











# ESSAYS BY DIVERS HANDS

BEING THE

## TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

### ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

NEW SERIES

VOL. III

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## INTRODUCTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE names of the contributors to this volume and the titles of their essays speak for themselves, and need but few words of introduction. And these may more fitly be concerned, not so much with the individual essays, as with their mutual relation and general significance.

Lectures addressed to the Royal Society of Literature, as is usual with such bodies, are purely a matter of individual choice. There is, for better or for worse, no attempt to arrange them in a series, still less to make them the mouthpiece of any school or movement. It is therefore of real interest to find that four of the six addresses given between March and November, 1922, and here printed, deal with fundamental problems and principles. The present and future state of the English language, English dramatic art, English literature and English painting are successively passed in review. Moreover, the underlying theme of Mr. Chesterton's paper on William Cobbett is the present order of English social and economic life, which Cobbett denounced in advance, and which is now being weighed in the balance. Thus each of these essayists, in the particular sphere of his interest, has instinctively felt that we are

passing through a period of disintegration and reconstruction, through "processes of death and re-birth."

These last words are taken from Sir Henry Newbolt's address on "The Future of the English Language," which fittingly comes first in order, not only on account of its date of delivery, but because the problems of language are preliminary to all others. Words are wholly, or in part, the raw material of the poet, the dramatist, the actor, and the pamphleteer, and the painter needs them when he passes from the practice to the theory of his art.

Those who, like myself, sat for two years on the Departmental Committee on English under Sir Henry's chairmanship will read with special interest his address, which, in a sense, is a personal epilogue to the Committee's Report. He identifies himself with the view of which Professor Jespersen of Copenhagen has been the chief exponent, that English, having "passed out of the stage of unnecessary terminations and vain repetitions," has "been perfected as an instrument of intelligent speech." It need therefore not take to heart the charges of linguistic decadence made by an earlier school of philologists. But just because it is the speech of a far-flung Empire, and indeed since the war is becoming increasingly the *lingua franca* of the world, its vocabulary and syntax are day by day subject to corrupting influences, of which Sir Henry gives some highly amusing examples. But I, for one, share his confidence that the genius of our language will absorb, as it has done in the past, any novelties of idiom that are worth preserving, and will reject the rest. Let us give shelter and their chance of survival to even the most bizarre Trans-

atlantic colloquialisms, rather than admit the existence of a separate "American language," and thus break in two the English-Speaking Union.

In the future development of the English tongue the theatre is likely to play an increasingly important part. The performance of such plays as Eugene O'Neill's "Anna Christie" and "Diff'rent" will help to familiarise London audiences with strange patterns of speech. But it is with the production of the Shakespearean plays that are the common heritage of the Empire and the Republic of the West that Mr. Granville-Barker is chiefly concerned in his lecture on "Some Tasks for Dramatic Scholarship." It is a happy chance that this appears in print while the Tercentenary of the First Folio is being celebrated. Himself an actor, a dramatist, and a producer—in the fullest sense a man of the theatre—Mr. Granville-Barker speaks with exceptional authority when he asserts that "the scholar and actor have need of each other." Too long has there been division between them, with unfortunate results both in the library and on the stage. It would be well if all future Shakespearean actors and editors had Mr. Granville-Barker's "main contention" graven on the tablets of their heart:

"Dramatic art does demand the service of pure scholarship—and in the case of a period such as the Elizabethan, so uncertainly documented and with the threads of its traditions so broken—of various sorts of scholarship. But drama can only be profitably considered in its full integrity. We may have, for the purposes of its service, to divide it into categories, to treat of its literary, its technical, its histrionic aspects. But unless we always can visualise

our plays as completed things—living in the theatre—we shall always tend to be astray in our conclusions about them.”

It is noteworthy that another representative man of the theatre, Mr. John Drinkwater, has recently at the Folio Tercentenary luncheon in the Stationers’ Hall spoken to the same effect. For the suggested practical applications of Mr. Granville-Barker’s thesis readers will turn to the address itself. His vision of not one, but twenty National Theatres, dedicated especially to the production of Shakespeare’s plays, would include not only those already projected for London and Stratford-on-Avon, but others in every great centre of population. And his sketch of “a various edition of a new sort, one that would epitomise Shakespeare the playwright,” makes one anticipate joyfully the day when such an edition will appear with Mr. Granville-Barker’s name on the title-page.

While Mr. Granville-Barker is engaged in clearing away the traditional obstacles to our full understanding and enjoyment of Shakespeare on the stage and in the study, Mr. Alfred Noyes is concerned with a novel and more fundamental danger to all that poet-dramatist stands for. In his essay on “Some Characteristics of Modern Literature,” he deplores the fact that a large part of this literature has “turned from the world that contained the souls of Shakespeare and Beethoven, and insisted on pointing us to the dust and ashes in which it says that these and our whole universe must end.” Mr. Noyes’ address is frankly a *pronunciamento*, a ringing challenge to all those tendencies in recent literature, especially in poetry, which appear to him to be negative, destruc-

tive, anarchic. With the authority of one who is himself a poet, and with the courage of a first-class fighting man, Mr. Noyes does battle with all and sundry for the continuity of our tradition. He stands unflinchingly for the principle that the "basis of the universe in an ultimate harmony is the first postulate of all thought, all science, all art, all literature."

It is all to the good that these questions should be so fearlessly, so explicitly, so eloquently raised. It is possible, I hope, to accept Mr. Noyes' main principles and be grateful for his championship of them, and yet to have an ear for the warnings of literary history that authentic new voices have in the past been unrecognised, and may be so again. But this is not our main immediate danger. The nemesis that has followed on the stupid bludgeoning of Wordsworth and Keats, of Wagner and Ibsen, is that criticism to-day, with the fear of Swift's "Prince Posterity" before its eyes, is unreasonably shy of condemning any novelty, however eccentric or extravagant. Mr. Noyes may help to put new courage in its heart, and fresh strength in its hands.

Professor Paul de Reul's essay on "The Centenary of Shelley" forms, from one point of view, a pendant to Mr. Noyes' lecture. For revolutionary as were Shelley's religious, political and social views, he poured them forth through the time-honoured prosodic channels. His all-dominant passion for freedom did not extend to "free verse." This is also true of Swinburne, of whom Professor de Reul (who holds the Chair of English Literature in the University of Brussels) has recently published an elaborate study.

Shelley, in spite of his humanitarian cosmopolitanism, has not had the same popularity on the Continent as Byron. It is therefore interesting to note the increasing attention that is being paid to his poetry among the Latin peoples. One outcome of this was Señor Salvador de Madariaga's recent essay on "Shelley and Calderón." Professor de Reul's centenary lecture is another. Though he classes himself with justification among "true Shelleyans," he is no blind admirer. He holds that we "ought to improve the occasion of a centenary anniversary by attempting a judgment, calm and impartial, definitive—as far as human things can be—of the hero we are celebrating." He thus in the first half of his address plays the part of devil's advocate, analysing those flaws in Shelley's art to which the French intelligence and temperament are peculiarly alive. But his criticisms are merely the prologue to an interpretation of the essentials of the poet's genius, which is a fitting garland to be laid on his tomb "on the completion of his first century of immortality."

It needs an effort to realise that Shelley and Cobbett were contemporary products of rural society in the English home counties. Each was at war with the social order of his time, the one on abstract revolutionary principles, the other on hard, practical grounds of experience. Each attained his own "supremacy of style," the one in lyrical utterance, the other in racy prose. It is the beauty of Cobbett's Billingsgate, and its value as an element in English speech, that Mr. Chesterton first emphasises. Here his paper links itself with Sir Henry Newbolt's, and with our President Lord Crewe's, essay in last year's

volume on "Some Writers on English Country Life," where Cobbett's descriptive powers were illustrated.

But, as has been already said, it is with Cobbett's attitude to "those huge human things that create what we call history" that Mr. Chesterton is above all concerned. His interpretation of that attitude, his revelation of Cobbett in the rôle of prophet, his comparison of him with Carlyle on the one hand and with Blake on the other, must be read in his own words. All that is particular and personal falls away; the matter is brought *sub specie æternitatis*.

It has been a pleasing feature of these volumes that each has included, in addition to the essays on literature, one on a subject from the allied arts. Leonardo da Vinci and Beethoven have thus had a place in our collections, and this year Mr. Fagg deals with "The Naturalistic Motive in Modern Pictures." Even those who, like myself, can claim no expert knowledge of the subject must be impressed by the philosophic grasp shown in the essay, and profit by the illumination that it throws on phases of the art of painting from the time of El Greco downwards to contemporary Post-Impressionism.





# THE FUTURE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

BY SIR HENRY NEWBOLT, C.H., D.LITT., LL.D.

[Read March 22nd, 1922.]

THE subject which I am to consider here is not one of those about which either argument or prophecy would be in place. The best that can be done is only to suggest, and suggestion is often conveyed more easily when it is thrown out, as it were, unconsciously, or at any rate without any apparent exercise of the will. I propose then to set forth a simple train of thought as it actually ran through my own mind, without motive, and without preparation.

The beginning of my meditation was as follows: I chanced to have taken down from the shelf for some other purpose the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, and I was captivated afresh by the little landscape picture with which the story begins. The young man going to Thessaly on business, riding wearily through the night on his white pony, over valleys of wet turf and sticky fields, comes at last to the cheering moment of dawn. He jumps down from the saddle, and like a good rider rubs down his horse with a bunch of fern, takes off the bit, and leads him to a gentle slope where he can refresh himself in the way usual with horses; then while the hungry beast wrenches a walking breakfast from the grass, his master overtakes two of his fellow travellers who had got a little ahead—and immediately we enter upon the long chain

of tales which make the book. No one who has ever read this story can have failed to be struck by its modernity ; it is true that the prevailing atmosphere is romantic and picaresque, but the social habits and superstitions of the *personae* often remind us strangely of those of the last ten years in England, seen perhaps through a rather Elizabethan imagination : the style and vocabulary seem nearer to the twentieth than to the second century. It is difficult, for example, not to believe that "jentaculum ambulatorium"—a walking breakfast—would have sounded stranger in the ears of the Augustans than it does in our own. The word "jentaculum" is not, I believe, found in classical Latin. Perhaps historians will say that breakfast was not a meal known to the Romans ; they have said the same thing about the Middle Ages, and there they are undoubtedly wrong, as John of Gaunt's household bills will prove. The truth would appear to be that breakfast was not a meal known to Latin literature of the best period ; but that is quite a different matter. If language was given to us to conceal our thoughts, literature has certainly been created by us to conceal our lives. Intimate and familiar details are so seldom and so slightly referred to, that to discover anything about the daily life of the Romans or Greeks, it is necessary to read the dull mosaics into which learned professors like Herr Becker have worked up the result of their researches. When I first discovered for myself that breakfast was recognised by name, at any rate in the Silver Age, I was as much surprised and pleased as when in the pages of Martial I first came upon the ancestor of the Italian ice-cream merchant, selling

little glass tumblers of sherbet and snow in the streets of Rome. And that was in my last year at school instead of in my first.

Even more complete—more necessarily complete—is the concealment in literature of the everyday use of language. People do not talk like books; they do not even try to. A boy may have read nearly all the orthodox Latin books before he comes across the word “oppido.” I believe that Cicero never once used it in the whole range of his speeches, though it peeps out in a private letter where he says he is afraid he looked, or might look, “oppido ridiculus”—mighty absurd. “Oppido” is, of course, a bit of slang, an intensive word, as it were magnifying whatever was spoken of to the proportions of a whole town. By the time of Apuleius it must have been old, for this derivation was entirely forgotten. “Lignum a me toto oppido et quidem oppido quaesitum”—he had been looking for wood all over the town, and with any amount of energy—as it were, a town-full of energy. This expression, which was in fact a tautology, was intended by Apuleius, and no doubt accepted by his readers, as a good pun. Slang and puns then were common among the Romans, and though Livy, Virgil, Horace and Tacitus have nearly succeeded in concealing the fact, it has been given away to us by Apuleius; and this is just what one would expect from a writer who, though a Roman citizen of the Empire, was by birth a Numidian from near Tunis, contemptuous of the old Roman morality and the classical Roman style, not above writing “ingenious verses in honour of a patent dentifrice,” and seeking success by the equally modern trick of

popularising science and philosophy, jumbling up hypnotism, eugenics, religion and studies of criminal character in a style cleverly compounded of slang, solecisms, archaisms, and preciosities. It is clear that a great change was passing over the mental life of the Empire, and that the language was not only following the change, as it must always do, but was already on the downward slope, at the foot of which it was at last broken to pieces.

This fall is for us full of interest, I may even say of dramatic interest, for we know the result in the case of the Latin language, but of our own English we cannot tell whether it will go through, or escape from, the same processes of death and re-birth. At the moment in which we now stand, we find it easy to imagine, and to sympathise with, the feeling of a Roman gentleman in the later centuries of the Empire, who saw that every day the grand classic phrases were less and less used, and were looked upon as dull, provincial, and old-fashioned : worse still, that their place was being taken by a language only fit for schoolboys, servants and buffoons. He would be in despair ; nevertheless, if he could to-day survey the landscape of history, he would have at any rate the consolation of observing three great literatures, the Italian, the Spanish, and the French, each as great as their Latin ancestor, which could never have been created without the ruinous breakdown of the old language. And this is not all, for English, too, though not a Latin language, is a fabric which has been greatly enriched from the ruins of Rome.

The process has been a rather interesting one, and to give any idea of it an immense number of examples

would have to be offered. I will take two of the simplest and most obvious. The word "castrum" originally denoted a camp or strong place. The pedigree of this word shows that its meaning not only developed, but diverged; in the *Satyricon* of Petronius we find the four scoundrels in the story leaving the city and repairing "ad castellum Lycurgi, equitis Romani." This is not a "castle" in any sense of the word; it is the country house of a Roman gentleman, and the immediate course of the story proves this, for when the local policeman arrives to take the names and addresses of the visitors, they escape by the ground-floor windows. It is this meaning of "castellum" which passed into the French language. The "chastel" was no doubt at first generally fortified, but by the time of Froissart not always so. It became "chastaus," and finally "château," which in modern France does not connote portcullises, donjons, arrow-slits, or battlements. From France the word has even passed, but very recently, into our own language: in Mr. de la Mare's Poems we find a dream of a "Dark Château" standing among waterfalls and cypresses with ivy and wild roses climbing upon its walls: the word is used simply as an English word. All this is in strange contrast to our own word "castle," which has steadily maintained its feudal and military associations. We have in England castles here and there which are no longer castellated, but the visitor who sees them for the first time generally complains that "this is not a castle at all!"

An instance of a different kind may be taken from Ronsard. In a charming poem he writes:

“ Le petit enfant Amour  
 Cueillait des fleurs à l'entour  
 D'une ruche, où les avettes  
 Font leur petites logettes.”

“ Avettes ” are “ little bees,” and they remind us that the Latin “ apis ” has had a divergent descent within the French language itself : it is as follows :—

- (i) Apis — ape — apicula — abelha — abeille.
- (ii) Apis — ape — apette — avette.

The result is that the language possesses two distinctly different words for “ bee,” though they are not different by origin. For the writing of verse. I need not say, this is a great convenience. If the poet wishes to do so he can rhyme “ abeille ” to “ corbeille,” but if there are no baskets in his poem he can, like Ronsard, make his bees “ avettes,” and rhyme them to “ logettes.” There is also another word here which deserves notice. The modern editions of Ronsard spell the word “ leurs,” with a final “ s,” but this is a modern error. Ronsard himself wrote more correctly “ leur,” because the word is all that remains of the Latin “ illorum,” which is a genitive and cannot properly take a plural suffix. Either way it is a handy and well-sounding little word, and I think it must be admitted that after the delicate tripping of a line like—

“ Font leur petites logettes ”

there is a distinctly clumsy air about the Latin equivalent “ faciunt illorum parvas cellulas.” The French descendants of the Roman gentleman had not done badly with their inheritance. They had helped to make Pierre Ronsard the “ Prince of Poets.”

Latin then, we may say, was broken down to good purpose : what can we say of the same process in our own language ? Anyone who has tried to read such poems as those of Robert Manning, or of Chaucer himself, must have discovered that by the end of the fourteenth century English had already undergone a great series of changes. It was not in ruins, but in a condition to which perhaps the term “ linguistic decadence ” might be applied : by our German relatives it was actually so applied. Their propaganda before the war included a definite theory of English linguistic decadence : “ it was assumed that the inflectional system was the crowning development in the history of language, and that a speech which had lost its inflections was in a state of decay. Thus August Schleicher, the famous German philologist of the 'sixties, was wont to set the English ‘ had ’ side by side with its portentous Gothic ancestor ‘ habaidê-deima,’ and to sigh over the sad fate which had overtaken so splendid an original, ignoring the fact that the clumsy Gothic giant could not accomplish a tithe of the work which its useful and active little descendant to-day performs.” On the other hand it has been said, and I think truly, that English is the most serviceable, labour-saving, and practical instrument of thought, and the most precise, which civilised nations have at their command. To compare it, for example, with Latin : the word “ cantaveram ” amalgamates three ideas ; our phrase “ I had sung ” analyses them so that you can accentuate the personal element, the time element, or the action, as you will. Further, in our phrase the number, the case, etc., are only expressed once ; in a sentence of Latin or German

they are frequently repeated twice or three times by words in agreement with each other. But multiplicity and repetition in a language are marks of the savage or rustic, *e. g.* in the language of the Australian blacks there are many different forms of the verb to express actions by two, three, four, fifteen or twenty persons acting together. Even the Greeks had a dual, and their language was by so much more primitive than ours. In the lower grades of our society this kind of repetition and particularity is still favoured, no doubt as a precaution against a probable slowness of intelligence in the listener : " I says to 'er, I says, says I," is not a form considered necessary amongst the educated. In other words, English has passed out of the stage of unnecessary terminations and vain repetitions which are still almost as common in German as in Latin : it has, in fact, been perfected as an instrument of intelligent speech.

But this comforting conclusion is itself of a kind to increase our anxiety for the future. We have a language fine not only in its precision, but also in its sound ; a sound not dependent upon sonorous terminations which have too much similarity and no real significance, but deriving its power from the close union of its form and content. The sound of the greatest English poetry is fine because it is " the sound of the meaning."

" On such a night  
 Stood Dido with a willow in her hand  
 Upon the wild sea banks and waft her love  
 To come again to Carthage."

or—



“ When music sounds, that which I was I am,  
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came.”

In lines like these the beauty is not a sonorous emptiness : it comes from a union of sense with a magical use of ordinary words. So powerful is the combination that we seem to have lost almost nothing by the disuse of part of our old picturesque vocabulary, and of some of those curious words scientifically described as homonyms. We no longer speak of monks as “ abbey-lubbers,” nor of wasps as “ apple-drones ” ; “ vane ” (weathervane), being too like “ vein ” in sound, has been ousted by the weather-cock ; “ vale ” has become “ valley ” to distinguish it from “ veil,” and for the same reason “ vails ” have been superseded by “ tips.” Seamen have long disputed whether a ship is “ under weigh ” or “ under way ” ; and it is curious that “ road,” which only occurs once in the Authorised Version of the Bible, is now almost always used in place of “ way,” which was universal down to the seventeenth century.

It is perhaps time to take some note of the changes which are now coming on our language at home and abroad in the world. First of all it is quite natural that in our Empire, as in that of the Romans, the metropolitan vocabulary should suffer a great deal of forcible expansion at the hands of adopted citizens of mixed education. We have long known that a Chinese coolie offering to take your luggage upstairs will probably use the form “ Me carry piecey-bag top-side,” and this is perhaps not much worse than the French which we ourselves speak on our travels. But in the great business community of the world, in which we are only partners, there is some serious

possibility of a new dialect arising. In the following letter a Japanese man of business is writing on complete terms of equality to his English partner :

“ Regarding to the matter of escape the penalty for non delivery of this machine, there is only a way to creep round same by diplomat, and we must make statement of strike occur our factory (of course big untrue) and please address my person on enclosed form of letter, and believe this will avoid the trouble of penalty of same. As Mr. Henry Farmer is most religious and competent man, also heavily upright and godly, it fears me that useless apply for his signature. Please therefore attach same by Yokohama office making forge, but no cause for fear of prison-happenings as this is often operated by other merchants of highest integrity.

“ It is highest unfortunate Arthur Hulburd so god-like man, and excessive awkward for business purpose. I think more better add little serpent-like wisdom to upright manhood, and thus found good business edifice.”

Another attractive specimen of Imperial good-fellowship is the following, addressed to a stranger in this country :

“ Jamulpur, E.I.R.

“ DEAR FRIEND,—Kindly send me a copy of scientific Review Bedrock which is published by your editorship.

“ I hope that you will accept this my request. My best compliments to you and to your lover and my sweet love to your children. Sharp reply is solicited.

“ Yours affectionately,

M. A. RAZA, M.F.C.  
Mechanical Workshop E.I.R.  
Jamulpur.”

The following have also been recently received from India :

(1) “ I wish to report the vile manner in which Driver ——

carried out shunting duties at the station. This Driver is not in favour of the pointsman's flag nor will he view the shunter's signals but remains murmuring within himself. He then furiously charge the waggons with gravity of his ill-will to do so until contents palm pots were reduced to entire emptiness. I trust T.M. will kindle some warm instructions in the bosom of this Driver."

(2) "I beg you be allowed to put myself under your supreme art and control I got no sence to control myself

"Your Affectionate poor Fellow

JOHN GBADAMOSI."

"P.S. I am even better than this testimonial if you employ me your work will be more and more amen."

The following is from our great Dominion in the West :

"MISTER DEAR FREN,—I got the motor pump I buy from you alrite, but why for Gods sake you doan send me no starter, whats use of motor when she doan have no starter, I lose to me my customier—sure thing you doan trete me right—is my money not so good as the other fellah—I wate ten days and my customer he holler like hell for water for the motor pump—you know he is hot summer now, and the wind he know blow the mill. The motor pump he got no starter so what the hell he goan to go, you doan send me the starter quick I send he back and order some motor pump from another man.

"Goodbye.

"Your Fren,

H. GASTONG."

"P.S.—Since I rite these I find the goddam starter in the box. Excuse to me."

This genuine sentence may be taken as representing the Negro influence on the language of the United States :

"No, suh, he ain't come back sence I sawn him went out."

So much for outside influences, but even if these prove to be partly or wholly eccentric and ephemeral, we cannot forget that our business men have for some time been developing a dialect at home. It would be perhaps libellous to give genuine examples of business correspondence here. I can only say from my own experience that the following exchange of letters would not unfairly represent a correspondence quite possible at the present day between the honorary secretary of a literary society in any part of England and an English man of letters, proposing and accepting an engagement to speak or lecture :

(1) "DEAR SIR,—*Re* our conversation of the 9th ult., when you thought you could see your way to address our Society, I beg to inform you that we are at the time of writing in a position to solicit fulfilment of your kind promise and would ask you to quote us a choice of dates for same."

(2) "Your esteemed favour to hand crossing mine of even date. I now beg to confirm same and hereby accept your valued invitation for an early fixture as per list appended : 13th, 14th or 15th inst., 2nd or 3rd prox."

No concealment is necessary in the case of the following letter in departmental English which recently appeared in *The Times* :

" . . . The writer ventures to think it is worthy of preservation as a record of the style of correspondence used by Government officials in time of war. It is as follows :

"The attached Army Form B 178 is returned to you for favour of disposal in accordance with the instructions contained in Appendix 77 of A.C.I. 455 of 1917 (*d*) and (*f*), as amended by A.C.I. 23 of 1918, namely, to the Officer Commanding as named in the schedule to General Instructions 2, issued with A.C.I. 13 of 1917, amended by A.C.I. 40 of 1918, *i.e.*, the Officer Commanding the Depot."

“ So far as I can make out the translation into commercial English is as follows : ‘ Attached form should have been sent to the Officer Commanding the Depot.’ ”

Perhaps no comment on these letters is necessary. It is sufficient to know that they are typical specimens, and all but two chosen from a large number of genuine examples ; moreover they cannot be dismissed as ludicrous mistakes of foreigners. They are all the work of citizens of the British Empire or of the United States, for whom English may be said to be, though in varying degrees, their own language : they are at present casual and individual forms, but they are all contributing to the formation of a new idiom, and they are doing this under very slight control. School-masters do what they can, but their methods are often unpopular ; those who speak our language are for the most part freedom-loving, careless, illogical, and easily captivated by novelty. They think very little about their speech-inheritance, and when they do think they are apt to conclude that it can look after itself as it did in the time of their fathers. This attitude is a striking contrast to that of some other nations. The French have long been remarkable, not only for the scientific care with which they direct and correct the development of their language, but also for the strong feeling of imaginative loyalty with which they regard it. Witnesses who appeared before a recent Committee on the Teaching of English gave very striking evidence upon this point. The humblest of French peasants may be heard to rebuke his children for an expression which in his opinion is “ not good French.” In one district of France a peasant will speak in patois to his animals, but not

to his horse, because, as he says, the horse knows what is French and what is not. The Anglo-Saxon carter and shepherd speak an admirably terse and effective language to their teams and collies, but it cannot by any stretch be called English. Miners of Lancashire or Staffordshire also speak a fine-sounding language, and are devoted to it, but it is not the English of the rest of England, and that very fact is partly the cause of their pride. We may hope that our true and characteristic dialects will be long in disappearing, but also that standard English may be added to them; bi-lingualism is in every way more desirable than Babel.

Our chief concern, however, must be with Standard English itself. It is no mere patriotic boast to say that it is the most important language in the world; it is on the way to becoming the universal language, and International Conferences have actually declared that it ought to take that place. On the other hand, there is a group in the United States who talk of frankly abandoning the name and the use of English and substituting the "American language," which they declare to be already in existence among them. We do not share this hope or expectation, because we greatly value community of language as a link of understanding between the two peoples, and as the possible basis of a feeling of fellowship. The matter is one which concerns us in England very nearly, because the language used by Americans both in speech and in literature has always been attractive to our people, and because it is now coming over here more frequently and more actively than it has ever done. Language owes a large proportion of its

changes to the taste and freedom of youth, especially at schools and universities. It is an important fact that out of about 4000 undergraduates at Oxford to-day, there are 1000 who come from America or from the outlying parts of the British Empire. I have heard it said recently that it is often difficult for older people to understand what is being said in conversation by a group of Oxford undergraduates.

I can believe this, but I must add that it does not much alarm me; fashions in language are very catching, but they have a way of passing very quickly—they seem to thrust each other out. The peculiar dialects and vocabularies of Max Adeler, Bret Harte and Mark Twain ran through the schools of England like a prairie fire. The fire has so completely burnt itself out that most of those under the age of 25 years whom I have lately questioned declare that they have never read a word of any of the three. They have even forgotten, or almost forgotten, the dialect of O. Henry, which was equally popular only three years ago, but is now as dead as Uncle Remus or Helen's Babies. A word or a phrase here and there no doubt survives because it deserves to survive, and this, after all, is very much what has been happening for centuries, in the main to our great advantage.

I believe then that we can stand a great deal of new slang, absorb the desirable part of it, and work off the rest. The danger would seem to lie in a different direction—in a possible degradation of the structure of language. The structure of language, or in other words, the form of expression in speech, is so intimately connected with the structure of the mind or the form of thought itself, that it is impossible to

change the one in any serious degree without changing the other. The world seems to have entered upon an age in which the most necessary quality for language is not so much greater flexibility as greater precision. The steady permeation of our life by scientific method has had some evil effects, but has undoubtedly strengthened us on the intellectual side, and given at any rate greater possibilities to the arts. It would be paradoxical and lamentable too if at the same moment a general lapse into slipshod ways of writing and speaking should occur and should react, as it inevitably must, upon national ways of thought.

The remedy is not easy to find, and if found will be still more difficult to apply. The Poet Laureate has been happily inspired in the foundation of his Society for Pure English, which devotes itself to scientific and historical study of the uses of English in the past and present, and without claiming to legislate or to deliver academic judgments, places the facts before the English-speaking world in such a way that the legitimate inferences can be easily drawn. Americans have been fortunately possessed by the same idea, and a combination of their best scholarship with our own for the practical purpose of recording and furthering the development of our common language is at this moment in progress. The proposed Society will have neither the will nor the power to compel change or to arrest it, but it can hardly be doubted that it might have a beneficent and far-reaching effect, not only upon the future of the English language, but, as a natural corollary, upon the thought and influence of the English-speaking races.



## SOME TASKS FOR DRAMATIC SCHOLARSHIP.

BY HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER, F.R.S.L.

[Read June 7th, 1922.]

I ASSUME, to begin with, that dramatic art has need of the services pure scholarship can render. I may be told that in this respect it has nothing to complain of. Certainly we can find in the British Museum Library a mass of critical literature upon drama. But two things are noticeable about this. An overwhelming proportion of it—of the native English product certainly—is devoted to Elisabethan drama ; and even so a large part is written by people who, you might suppose, could never have been inside a theatre in their lives.

It would be unreasonable to complain of the first limitation, and unwise, considering scholarly tastes—though the taste of the scholar in drama, as in light literature, is often, to the plain man, surprising—unwise to lay stress upon the second. Elisabethan and Jacobean drama were until recently so much more vital and historically interesting than any that succeeded them, that here was comparatively the fairest field for anyone interested in drama itself, and positively a very fertile one for any student of either the life or literature of that period. The field has now been cropped pretty close, however. In some places, I think, it has been trodden bare.

But the second limitation—the scholar's indifference to the theatre—has been a serious one for us,

and, I suggest, for the scholar too. For him, because he has often gone to great trouble to elucidate points which, if he could but have seen or even imagined the play in being—acted, that is, in a theatre, where a play belongs—would have elucidated themselves. For us, because those of us who wish to inform ourselves thoroughly upon these matters, have to wade through a large amount of what is, frankly, very learned rubbish.

And Shakespeare, of course, has suffered most—as he has also profited much—at the hands of the commentators.

With the minor Elisabethans, with the Jacobeans, the plain man, the average lover of English drama, need have a very limited concern. He has at present, as a rule, no concern with them at all. He can quote you “Marlowe’s mighty line” (without being too sure who gave it that certificate), he can probably quote at least two of the mighty lines themselves, “Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia,” and “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?”—though the very editor of a literary paper has been known to get the latter one wrong. He remembers that Lamb was very strong on “the old dramatists,” and that Swinburne has lavished orotund and—be it said with as much respect as possible—often very ridiculous praise upon Webster, Tourneur, Massinger and their fellows.

The question of the absolute value of this school of drama I will not discuss. It has recently been made the object of very destructive criticism by Mr. William Archer, who feels more strongly on the subject than I do, and speaks more learnedly than ever I can.

Personally, I am prepared to welcome the minor

Elisabethans in the theatre when anybody troubles to bring them there. But I do not deeply mourn their absence ; and I think that Mr. Archer adds yet another to the tale of his great services to the theatre if he discredits the cant (it is not so common, perhaps, as it was) that cries for the good old days when these masterpieces were the common fare of the public (those days have not existed since the plays were newly written), and will see no virtue in modern work—when this is written (as Elizabethan drama also was) to suit contemporary taste, and does not seek to give itself “ classical ” airs.

But Shakespeare is another matter. How much another matter one has only to take a course in the minor Elisabethans to realise. Whether or no he is for all time, he will certainly—given his chance, though this is mostly denied him—fill and outlast our age as a living dramatic power. And his genius, I sometimes think, may better be measured, not by the clever things that are written about him, but by the effect created by a company of schoolboys shouting their way whole-heartedly through one of the plays. Though more than a third of it—in words and allusions—must be obscure to them, they will revel in it ; and—with a little good will—so may we. The acting will be of the crudest, interpretation far too fine a term. Yet to this treatment the play will still respond, while it may be inert under the touch of the most learned professor.

But if I say that Shakespeare has suffered from his commentators, I expressly do not refer to the distinguished scholars—one could name half-a-dozen—whose painstaking and clairvoyant work upon the

texts is giving to our necessarily dim sight new spectacles to read them by, nor to any purely historical research, such as is realised for us in Sir Sidney Lee's classic (for it has already that rank), 'Life of Shakespeare.' I mean rather the aesthetic criticism which, book after book, still is lengthening the librarian's entry under the letter "S." Some of this is no doubt life-giving. One may use the term advisedly, for instance, about A. C. Bradley's Oxford lectures. I suppose I shall not seem to compliment an eminent professor when I say that his Hamlet and Othello seemed to me like a very great actor's conception of the parts. But I can think of no higher compliment to pay. For that is what I mean by life-giving. To Professor Bradley the plays are plays and never cease to be plays. They are bodies to be animated. But he knows that when they are animated they will but move according to the body's laws. He does not expect them to turn into historical documents or problems in metaphysics. Shakespeare has left us these plays inert. He could leave them no other way—though a little proof-correcting and a few stage directions would have saved us a deal of trouble. We can all strike a spark or two of life into them. But it needs a particular combination and a high degree of knowledge, skill or sympathy to kindle the full flame. Of such æsthetic criticism as Professor Bradley's one only wishes one had more. And one could name other names with gratitude. But it would be in the degree, I believe, that the work contains this life-giving quality. And that again belongs, I suggest, to a realisation of the drama as a living thing, of the

integrity of a play as acted in a theatre, never fully alive till then. Its larger life—for I admit it has one—is the extension of that, but never to be attained by leaving that out of account.

Much, however, of the aesthetic comment upon Shakespeare (I am dealing with printed comment, though I am aware of what could be said of certain professional performances, if they too were brought into comparison) is the very reverse of life-giving—that will be admitted. However much learning it may display, it does but deaden our appreciation of Shakespeare as a creative artist. Open a volume of the Furness Variorum Edition. Not a line but has its gloss. There are passages that command two or three pages of notes. And the majority of them are futile. This is no reflection on Furness, whose business it was to include whatever had been responsibly said upon the Shakespearean text. But if one may estimate the value and quantity of what he thought it permissible to leave out by the value of what he put in, there opens up a two-century vista of the most appalling waste of scholastic time and energy.

We must remember, of course, that in the eighteenth century, and through much of the nineteenth, the plays were for theatrical purposes amazingly maltreated, both structurally and textually. And hardly within our own time has any conscience developed in this matter of their integrity. So that when I speak of the impression I receive that many of these commentators can never have been in a theatre at all, their shades might reply that they had—but that they did not find Shakespeare there. But, whatever

the cause, the effect, from the point of view of Shakespeare's preservation as a living dramatic force, has been lamentable. For the influence of this "scholastic" method of considering him naturally came to prevail in education generally. The theatre—where Shakespeare has somehow managed to live on, even though crippled—and the study have become divorced in sympathy. It is doubtful whether the actor, in his heart, despises the scholar, or the scholar the actor, more. And yet each has need of the other. The actor often sins, no doubt, in pure ignorance of what the scholar could tell him, but he is, I think, justified in ignoring the opinion of any scholar who can advance such opinions as that "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*" and "*King Lear*" are unfitted for the stage. An odd sort of praise, this, to bestow on a great playwright.

I say that the scholar and actor have need of each other. And here is my main contention. Dramatic art does demand the service of pure scholarship—and, in the case of a period such as the Elisabethan, so uncertainly documented, and with the threads of its traditions so broken—of various sorts of scholarship. But drama can only be profitably considered in its full integrity. We may have, for the purposes of its service, to treat separately of its literary, its technical, its histrionic aspects. But unless, while doing so, we can still visualise the plays as completed things—living in the theatre—we shall always tend to be astray in our conclusions about them.

Now this, though a truism, is a hard saying, and harder than most people realise. And while modern scholars begin to admit the obligation, they still

stand uncertain before the difficulties of its fulfilment. It was, I think, not until he had published several volumes that Dr. Furness began to include in his *Variorum* accounts of notable performances, and notes upon the readings that distinguished actors have given to important passages in the plays. It stands to reason that these things may be enlightening to the student—even though some of them are of merely historical interest. But such records do not take us very far. In the first place because it is difficult to describe the performance of a play. One can be accurate enough about scenery, costumes, and even grouping. But when one comes to the acting—the performance itself, that is—there is little to be done but to record the impression it makes upon each of us. Not that the impressions of a cultured critic are not valuable evidence. But they are sometimes more informing as to the critic himself than the performance.

Secondly, we have no record worth calling so of any Shakespearean performance before the seventeenth century break of tradition. And we must remember that the gulf which separates us from a knowledge of the plays as Shakespeare had them performed has been still further widened by the hundred and fifty years and more of maltreatment of the text.

But, if we could have put before our eyes—our physical eye, or our mind's eye—a performance of, say, "Hamlet," as Shakespeare ordered it, it would be most informing. And apart from what one may call the external information, it might even offer us a key to the solution of many of the psychological,

if not the philosophical, questions in the play. For Shakespeare, apart from all else, was a considerable technician—which is to say that he adapted his end to his means when he could not, or would not trouble to, adapt his means to his end. I say “would not trouble to.” He may have been—as he seems to have been—very careless in matters over which a modern playwright would be scrupulous (I have always felt, for instance, that the difficulty about Hamlet’s age, which has given many worthy people grounds for great uneasiness, may well spring either from Shakespeare’s forgetting by the time he got to Act IV what he had implied in Act I, or if he remembered, never bothering to reconcile the inconsistency). On the other hand he was possibly very particular over things as to which we may be—and are!—very careless. And it would certainly be instructive to know what these were.

Can we divine them? Can we, by one means and another, build up a vision of a Shakespearean performance, and then—this is important, indeed in it lies the only importance of the matter except historically—and then separate the *essentials* from the *incidentals*? For instance, there can have been no aesthetic advantage in the fact that a gentleman might puff smoke in Burbage’s face. On the other hand the intimate touch that the actor was in with his audience must undoubtedly have influenced the method of the dialogue, and may have led Shakespeare to make certain demands on his actors of which their modern successors—not putting the plays to this same proof—remain unaware.

It is easy to find examples of what I mean. The



Elisabethan audience was not only in what a modern actor would consider uncomfortably close touch, but it was probably an unruly audience besides. This would account for a certain violence of attack which is indicated for the actor when it is necessary to capture the attention of the audience after a bustle of movement. Note the explosiveness of

“ O that this too too solid flesh would melt ”

after the elaborate departure of the King and Queen and their attendants. Note the same sort of opening

“ O what a rogue and peasant slave am I ”

after the amusing medley of the players and Polonius is disposed of.

On the other hand note the careful preparation by Polonius and the King for the necessarily quiet beginning of

“ To be or not to be.”

In a modern theatre these seem to be refinements of stagecraft. On Shakespeare's stage such things were perhaps of fundamental import. And if the modern actor and the modern scholar does not take account of them, he is like a musician who may be putting “forte” where the composer intended “piano” and “diminuendo” for “sforzando.”

I do not want to press such considerations too far; they are clues to follow, that is all. But method may help us to account for matter.

Again, consider the scene in “The Winter's Tale,” where Leontes is playing with Mamilius and watching Hermione and Polixenes. Picture that as it was necessarily staged by Shakespeare, consider the effect of the obscure incoherencies of the dialogue when the

speaker was intimate with his audience and the other characters were removed, probably towards the inner stage. Contrast this with the technical task set the modern actor if he and the other characters are placed by picture stage and footlights first upon another plane of existence in respect of the audience, and, themselves, all upon the same plane, as one may say. Consider certain passages in the part of Othello from this point of view: see how the effect of "Farewell the tranquil mind" and "the Propontic and the Hellespont" speech is helped by preparation. Burbage probably had hard work to capture his audience, but he was given the means to move them the more profoundly once he had them in his grip. And these—here is my point—are not simply superficial matters. For the playwright must make methods germane to characters. They are among the signposts, then, to our study of the content of the plays themselves.

I used the phrase "putting these plays to the proof"; it is most difficult to realise them unless we do. Appreciation of drama is not a matter of the reason only. Emotion has its part; not only the obvious emotion that we may be aware of, but all sorts of psychological obscurities are brought into play. There is the effect of human association in an audience; there are the comparisons that an unconscious memory tends to make with the impressions that are immediately being created in us. There are half-a-dozen conditions which the actual performance of a play provides, which no previous or subsequent mental picture of it will fulfil. And upon these senses and susceptibilities the dramatist consciously—or unconsciously—plays.

But, once having seen a play acted, the impression made by the performance is very hard to shake off in the study. We can never be sure that we have quite succeeded.

Consider first for a moment how any modern visualisation of the play of "Hamlet" is apt to differ from Shakespeare's, and why.

Whatever he may or may not have had in his own mind's eye, he was not concerned to impress period and locality upon his audience. He was content that his characters should appear as contemporary figures moving upon a stage, not in an historical Denmark 600 years earlier. I don't say that, nowadays, we *cannot* dismiss from our inner vision the picture of Elsinore, A.D. 1000, as our twentieth century knowledge bids us conceive it, or—worse—as our stage convention of Elsinore, A.D. 1000, has taught us to conceive it. But it costs us an effort to do so. You may say that this does not matter a straw, that the true drama is taking place in the souls of the characters. But I must contend that appearances may be as misleading as they are meant to be informative. The mere aspect of the King, reminding us usually of Canute in 'Little Arthur's History of England,' encumbered with long robes and a heavy crown and sceptre, lodged whenever possible upon a throne perched on a platform—all that is a terrible handicap both to the actor and his audience. For surely there never was a more "Renaissance"—a more Italianate—figure than Claudius.

And Gertrude, we must remember, was played by a boy. Now I do not mean that Shakespeare let his fundamental conception of the woman, Hamlet's

mother, be influenced by that. But note, nevertheless, how well the implications of her appearance and conduct fit in with something a boy might represent, and how ill with the portly dame of recent theatrical custom. "I have heard of your paintings too. You jig, you amble, you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance." Make what allowance we may for the morbidity on matters of sex into which his mother's conduct has plunged him, Hamlet knows a hawk from a hernshaw, and one sort of woman from another. And it is certainly, it seems to me, his mother and not poor puzzled Ophelia that he has in mind. Consider the ironies of the closet scene. Her blood had *not* been humble. Hamlet's best hope of her was that she should assume the virtue that she had lost. Surely Shakespeare meant that she should at least have in her the outward makings of a minx. Even if Hamlet is 30, she need not, by Elisabethan customs, have been a day more than 46; and then, as now, ladies of that age were apt enough for jigging and ambling. Elisabeth herself, indeed, jigged a good deal at a much later time of life.

Well and good, you will say; but the student can arrive at these conclusions, if they are the right ones, by a study of the play and the exercise of a little intelligence. He can. But I should like to know for how many of us the vision of the Queen that we unconsciously call up is not shaped like the actress that we first saw in the part, an over-dignified and deep-voiced matron, a staid mother for the mature actor-manager, appearing as Hamlet.

Now one misconception leads to another, and

small causes have greater effects. I began by contending that much Shakespearean criticism is necessarily ineffective because it leaves out consideration of the theatre altogether; but it is as true that as much more is tangled in the web of its inappropriate presentation on the modern stage. The putting of a play to the proof of its acting *ought* surely only to be a help and not a hindrance even to the acutest critic. Any other contention must finally involve us in the wildest sort of a paradox. I must admit that the problem of the appropriate presentation of Shakespeare is beset with difficulties. But I maintain that its solution is the master key to the general appreciation of his art and to its preservation as a living force.

The problem is practically capable of no one solution. There is a chasm to be bridged—that which yawns between the consciousness of the seventeenth century in such matters and our own in the twentieth. We may, of course, easily exaggerate the width of the chasm. If the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under their skins, it is not only true that Shakespeare could still be finding his Falstaffs, Angelos, Malvolios and Macbeths in our modern society, but that any unfamiliarity which these figures, as he did draw them, may have for the modern audience is merely superficial, a matter of phrases and manners. The nature of Man has not changed much in three hundred years; if we turn hundreds into thousands this may still be true. Still, there is a chasm, an aesthetic chasm. Its bridging is a matter of convenience and of compromise. What has to be decided is how far we can

and must adapt our consciousness to the essential theatrical conditions of that time, and, alternatively, how far the technique of the plays will withstand adaptation to our accustomed uses without the content being in any way distorted.

It seems to me unquestionable that we ought to go back as far as we can to meet the seventeenth century without sacrificing the spontaneity of our apprehension of the plays, and substituting for it a merely archaeological understanding. For the technique and the content of a work of art are properly speaking interdependent—even though this law may be modified in the case of the drama by the unusually important intrusion into a play's completion by acting of the contemporary human factor—the two human factors, if you will, of actors and audience.

These human factors we cannot dogmatise away. We must make treaty with them. And to do that, to find a basis of agreement, we must experiment.

It is in this connection that I should like to register my appreciation of the work of Mr. William Poel, his founding of the Elisabethan Stage Society and his gallant persistence with his experiments in the face of many difficulties. His services have, of course, been recognised, but to my mind never sufficiently. And indeed when I think of the sheer lack of understanding of what the value of that service was by many of those whose special business it was to understand, I am rather ashamed. For appreciation of his work did not involve agreement with all he did, nor even with his treatment of individual plays. Personally, I found myself in disagreement with him five times out of ten. The value was experimental,

and much of it has, I fear, been lost by the lack of any adequate and constructive criticism of the experiments. Not that I will pretend to think Mr. Poel would ever have been very amenable to criticism. That is not a usual trait in the character of men with the fierce independence of mind and the obstinate courage which enable them to choose an untravelled way and follow it. But *we* could have profited. I venture to assert that an acute observer could be stimulated to a livelier understanding of a play of Shakespeare's by being brought to analyse his disagreement with Mr. Poel's bold assertions than ever he would be by the sight of a timid, haphazard staging which set out thoughtlessly to please as best it could.

For experiment we must have. It should be properly based on research, but, equally, it will stimulate the scholar in his research. And my hope for the immediate future of our classical drama lies in this combination, lacking hitherto. Its natural centre would be in a National Theatre, dedicated especially to the production of Shakespeare's plays. The non-existence of such an institution is not only a scandal; it is a mystery. And such an inconsistency it seems that, even in this country where we are inconsistent almost on principle, it must someday be remedied. It is well to remember that till 1843 we had in the Patent Theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, organisations of a sort that were recognised as National Theatres, and did, when they happened to get into the hands of public-spirited men—Garrick, Kemble, Macready—did make some attempt to fulfil their duties. And it is possible that if the question of the abolition of the patents had come to a head in

1853 instead of 1843—that is to say, at a time when the Prince Consort, with his tradition of endowed German theatres to turn to, had been at the height of his influence instead of looked upon as a foreign intruder—in 1853 that link between the State and dramatic art might not have been so rudely broken. The present state of things is one of the minor fruits of the industrial revolution and the extreme individualism of the nineteenth century. There is really nothing sacrosanct or traditional about it.

I should like to see not one, but twenty such theatres in existence. There is no need, however, to wait for their building. Production of Shakespeare under all sorts of conditions in all sorts of ways is almost bound to be a salient feature of the present remarkable revival of interest in drama. I say “in all sorts of ways,” because the productions will not be mainly the work of the well-equipped professional theatre, but of the countless societies and clubs and the like for the practice of the dramatic art which are springing up in villages, factories, universities and schools. And these, whether they will or not—and mostly they will—must be driven to simplicities of staging approximating to Elisabethan conditions.

This work might owe much to the guidance of the scholar. It would seem to be a very practical means by which he could enlarge the appreciation of his subject, and further—as I suggest—by which he could enlarge his own knowledge of it.

There is everything in a point of view. And this one seems to me such an eminently reasonable one from which to approach the study of Shakespeare that—modest as might be the scope of the work for



a while—upon such a basis could be founded something very like a new school of Shakespearean criticism. Its charter must be a recognition of the mutual help given by—and, if I may say so—the equal regard to be paid to the scholar and the player. And as fruit of the alliance—it would be indeed an almost necessary record of its achievement—we might project a *Variorum* edition of a new sort, one that would epitomise Shakespeare, the playwright, an edition that might appropriately be produced under the aegis of such a society as this that I have the honour to address and belong to.

I do not pretend to be able to visualise it in every detail, but the main conditions of its editing, negative and positive, one can tentatively, perhaps, set down.

In dealing with a play one may presume, for instance, that while it would not be for the editor to ignore—how could he?—the work of the more famous literary and philosophic critics, this would be matter for summary, rather than attachment to the text. The text itself might be that of the folio, with the generally accepted emendations incorporated. The other important ones might be recorded, without argument.

The weight of the editor's work would lie in his obligation always to exhibit the play in action, and all the material of learning he wished to assemble he should submit, primarily, to this test. This material would divide itself roughly into three parts.

First, there would be what can be inferred as to the Shakespearean practice in staging from the text itself.

This I believe to be a very great deal (a great deal

more than has been extracted yet)! There are difficulties of agreement about it, that are bound up in the still existing disagreement as to the actual construction of Shakespeare's stage. This is an ever-narrowing disagreement, I should suppose, though, saying this, I am brought up short by the recollection of a passage from the general introduction to the very latest edition of Shakespeare. In it Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, discussing the omission of scene-divisions, and referring to the couplet, the first line of it, Mercutio's

" 'Tis in vain

To seek him here that means not to be found":

the second Romeo's

" He jests at scars that never felt a wound"—

remarks (justly enough) that Shakespeare had no thought of a marked scene-division here. But he says besides, "We have only to read carefully to convince ourselves . . . that the lane and its wall should come just athwart one corner of the stage, that Romeo, having climbed the wall, crouches close . . . " etc., etc.

Now if that is a visualisation of the actual construction of Shakespeare's stage and not a fanciful description, I think that if argument from the text would not do it, only a few experimental performances would be needed to convince Sir Arthur that whatever else was the Shakespearean practice, this was not.

Much concerning the construction of the theatre has been rightly argued from the text of the plays. But in the light of this knowledge the construction of the play can be *re-studied*, and much concerning

its action may be determined. Point after point will come clear by the simple means of putting the play itself into action under appropriate conditions.

Secondly, there would be the recording and analysing of notable performances of the plays.

Much of this material, as we have noted, is vitiated by past (and present!) maltreatment of the text. There is little to be gained by discussing the performance of a play when it has constructively ceased to be Shakespeare's. On the other hand the readings that good actors have given to individual passages may be very enlightening. Some of the aptest comments in the Furness "Merchant of Venice" are to be found implied in Booth's elaborate notes of his own performance of Shylock. They are the better (to me) and certainly the more readable in that the meaning of a passage is implied—even as Shakespeare dramatically implied it—and not set out at logical length.

Such notes are indirectly enlightening too. They show us, for instance—some similar notes on Edmund Kean's readings very clearly show us—what the actor's treatment of the verse was. And it was often, apparently, very cavalier.

Thirdly, there would be the editor's hardest task—to record the modern treatment of the plays; treatment conceived, one will hope, in the light of the scholar's knowledge, but developed with the contemporary circumstances of their production in mind.

The material of this sort is none of it very old. It is only recently indeed that the problem has been posed: *How to present Shakespeare's plays in their integrity as works of art to a generation that cannot by*

*taking thought—cannot with the best will in the world—transform itself into Shakespeare's audience.* But this, as I have tried to indicate, is a problem, and, I have ventured to assert, the master problem of the whole Shakespearean affair. And while it is, perhaps, capable of no one solution, it is important that the researches into it should be made mutually helpful, and that each—whatever the variety of its practice—should contribute something to the elucidation of the *principles* involved.

It would be for the editor to record and classify this work. Much of it would be of no comparative importance. And often only a little of what is so may be a definite furtherance of the problem's *general* solution. Many productions will proceed according to some already recognised formula. And it is desirable that they should. For we want—among other things—to be able to enjoy Shakespeare at our ease. Also in many productions, only certain portions of the play will be experimentally treated. Obviously as time goes on there will be less and less need, as there will be less scope for sheer experiment. And a producer might be experimenting solely with the supernatural element in “Macbeth,” “A Midsummer Night's Dream,” or “The Tempest,” or with such a problem (some people do not even yet think it is one) as the costuming of “Antony and Cleopatra.”

It is clear, however, that our editor's task would not be the mere description of productions, the re-printing of newspaper notices. (Where Dr. Furness has done this, he has, I think, but wasted space. As a rule these “notices,” in the very nature of them,

cannot be—are not meant to be—estimates of the production's historical importance.) Nor, upon this same count, need the edition involve us in illustrations galore. One would rather look for a very drastic summarising, and for a very sharp distinction being made between what did and what did not contribute to the main purpose.

Each producer of a play, we must remember, has as his particular end the achievement of an effective and consistent presentation of that play. For him such an editing of its text should be a valuable guide—a saviour from many pitfalls, a diverter from many blind alleys. It would enable him to take full advantage of the labours of his predecessors. To the general student it should—so it seems to me—be a quite invaluable guide as to what to look for in Shakespeare the playwright, as he reads him, when he can only read him. Reading a play, be it remembered, is comparable to reading the score of a symphony and asks as much skill. Further, it would help him to a more completely critical appreciation of the play when he saw it on the stage.

May I say besides that—though here must undoubtedly be the end of my paper—this half-formed project for the re-editing of Shakespeare is by no means the end of the possibilities of partnership between the scholar and the man of the theatre as I see them.

The drama is an art of wide scope, and, technically, of a very great complexity. It is a curiously fettered art, in its immediate obligations to an audience, in its dependence upon time and place, and in its instability. This last is a paradoxical characteristic,

for while you must scheme a play's production as you would the building of a castle (it exists in three dimensions, so to speak), with fulfilment it vanishes like the smoke from the castle's chimney.

In the art's practice and development many aesthetic problems are involved, and I cannot persuade myself that it flourishes the better for their ignoring. The aesthetic of acting: in England practically nothing has been thought or written upon the subject. We differ upon its fundamentals. The principles of dramatic translation: we are indifferent to their existence. The influence of play-structure upon stage-structure, and the opposite: the development of a national technique of drama in expression of a national temperament—one could devise half-a-dozen such questions. The response to them may certainly be, "Does it matter?" Well, if the art of the theatre matters—yes. Not that dramatists and actors should worry themselves unduly about such things. They have their immediate work. Not by any means that the dramatic critic—commonly so called—should oppress the public, who asks but his opinion of the entertainment they are bidden to, with disquisitions upon the principles it embodies or defies. But if the drama is a fine art, then it demands pure scholarship, and its problems, in place and season, are worthy of discussion. And our education in such matters will fructify in its fuller appreciation. So much at least, by taking thought, we can accomplish. I have some faith, too, that from such a well-tended soil Nature may cause the finer flowers to spring.

## SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN LITERATURE.

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[Read October 25th, 1922.]

DESPITE the vagueness of the title which I have given to my paper, I want to attempt a very definite and difficult task this afternoon. I believe that the time has come, in art and literature, as in every other department of life, when we must take our bearings ; when we must try to discover, if possible, the direction in which we are moving, and—still more important—the direction in which we ought to be moving. We ought to make up our minds about certain fundamental principles, and say definitely whether we really want or do not want some of the new ideas which the police are engaged in suppressing, and many critics of art and literature encouraging. It is time, in short, to wake out of our Laodicean slumbers, and decide whether we are on the side of development and construction, or on that of destruction and a return to barbarism. The intellectual world is suffering to-day from a lack of any profound belief. It has lost its religion, and it has lost that central position from which it could once see life steadily and see it whole, under the eternal aspect. Rules and conventions, being no longer related to any central certainty, have degenerated into mere social codes which are subject to every

whim of fashion. The ruling passion, with old and young, is the desire to be in the "movement," no matter where it may be leading; and still more, the fear of being thought to be "out of the movement." It is a matter for curious reflection that these people are doing precisely what they quite erroneously think was done by the nineteenth century. They are slavishly following conventions, and forgetting (simply because their conventions are new) that there are realities, and eternal realities; standards, and eternal standards; foundations, and everlasting foundations.

One of the results of the great enlargement of the field of human thought during the last century was the increasing tendency among modern writers to lose sight of these realities, and to lose their hold on any central and unifying principle; to treat all kinds of complex matters as if they were quite simple, and, where a hundred factors were involved, to treat a problem as if it involved the consideration of only two or three. It was a century of specialisation, and each group of specialists strayed farther and farther from the common intellectual centre where they could once all meet. The old completeness of view, the white light of vision in which men so different as Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson could see the essential unity of this complex world; man as a soul and a body; life and death as a march to immortality, and the universe as a miracle with a single meaning; all that white light of vision has been broken up into a thousand prismatic and shifting reflections. We are in danger of losing the white light, not because it is no longer there, but because the age has grown too vast for us to re-combine its



multicoloured rays. Analysis has gone so far, specialisation has gone so far, decentralisation (or, in the most exact meaning of the word, eccentricity) has gone so far that we are in danger of intellectual disintegration. It is time to make some synthesis, or we shall find that art and letters are lost in a world without meaning. There are signs of it already on every side. On every side the same fight is being waged in art and letters as is being waged politically in Russia, a fight not between old fogeyism and bright young rebellion, but an abnormal struggle between sanity and downright insanity; between the constructive forces that move by law, and the destructive forces that, consciously or unconsciously, aim at destroying real values, at obliterating all the finer shades and tones in language and in thought, and at exalting incompetence.

There is an enormous difference between some of the destructive movements of to-day and the progressive revolutions of the past. Up till about thirty years ago revolutions in art and letters had a way of adding something of value to what we already possessed. The new revolutions merely take away. They say, for instance, to the painter: "It is unnecessary for you to know how to draw." (The Bolshevik value of that statement, of course, can be estimated by the multitude that it admits into the fold.)

In poetry, your new revolutionist invents no new forms—that would involve a difficulty, and he searches always for the easier way. He very often uses the old forms made easier. He says, sometimes, you should abandon metrical form altogether, and he

believes apparently that the regularly recurrent rhythms of the tides, the stars, the human heart, and of almost every true poet from Homer to the present day, were an invention of Queen Victoria. His own contribution is what he calls "free verse," and, as Mr. Chesterton said recently, "you might as well call sleeping in a ditch 'free architecture.'" If it were not too frivolous for this occasion I should very much like to read to this audience some of the work which is being published in school and college textbooks, and to give you also some extemporaneous and deliberate nonsense verses. I think I could defy anyone here to say with certainty which was the educational work. But the important thing is that the whole movement is backward from the highly and delicately organized to the indifferent homogeneousness of the lifeless—halting on the way, of course, at various stages of primitive brutality.

But there is a more serious aspect of the matter than this. All over the English-speaking world this hunt for the easier way in technique has been accompanied by a lowering of the standards in every direction. The quality of the thought and the emotion has been incredibly cheapened, and the absence of any fixed and central principles has led to an appalling lack of discrimination. Literary judgments in many cases have become purely arbitrary. Sometimes they are merely a matter of the coterie to which an author belongs, and they are marked by an intolerance, a dogmatism and an ignorance for which there is no parallel in our literature. The desire to break the continuity of our tradition has been fought by three or four outstanding

critics. It has been met by Mr. Edmund Gosse, with the weapon of an irony as delicate as that of Anatole France. Critics of a later generation like Mr. Clutton Brock, Mr. J. C. Squire and Mr. Robert Lynd have also steadily sought to maintain a just balance between the old and the new. In the *London Mercury* some months ago there was an article by Mr. Clutton Brock which should be read in every educational institution of the English-speaking world. But the tendency of the moment, backed by a hundred influences, some of them political, some of them apparently originating in Central Africa, and others in the cinematograph studios of Los Angeles, is to submerge all the finer shades of thought, all the subtler tones of beauty, in the general flood of half-educated mediocrity, tyrannously ruled by little literary Soviets, the members of which are able to spread their views in slackly edited journals. Instead of endeavouring to comprehend all that is of value in our literature, these people are continually endeavouring to eliminate everything but the particular result which they themselves desire to achieve.

The modern revolutionary, who merely uses the old forms made easier, does not usually know enough about them to recognise the really new and more difficult development. I say development because the really new is always a development. Your modern will congratulate himself on his freedom from the restrictions of Dryden, Gray, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Swinburne, without considering whether he has subjected himself to any compensating law, or evoked the beauty that can only arise out of a difficult medium, rebellious to the hand and brain. But if

our new revolutionary is confronted with a really new development, a new lyrical measure, for instance, springing out of the unspent and unageing fountains of our national poetry, with a throng of new harmonies, outer and inner, his faculties are about as much use as a basket of new-born kittens. He devotes himself then to the task of misrepresentation, by one of the ancient methods described by Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*, or—and in this he must be admitted to be comparatively new—by sheer bluff and the parrot-like use of a meaningless catchword. He will proclaim that all poetry must now specialise in the making of “images,” and he will turn a sublimely blind eye upon the fact that all the great poets from Homer to the present day have filled their work with “images,” and that they had the advantage of including other things too.

Another “modern” will specialise in great “bleak” thoughts, of an immensely “noble” and impressive character, about the complete futility of human life and the absolute fatuousness of the universe. Such thoughts are easily discovered, if one is a thought-hunter: and they are certainly no newer, at their best, than Lucretius. But, instantly, every other kind of writing becomes “shallow” or trivial. The note of joy and human affection is sneered out of existence by vicariously “bleak” critics. A steady disparagement of the intellectual capacity, and even the sincerity, of those who disagree with the great and noble conclusions aforesaid, begins to flow through the literary columns; and all the literature produced by those who have something to say and something to believe in is dismissed as “rhetorical.”

Tennyson, of course, is condemned for writing even those vivid and biting lines in "Locksley Hall," so very much more realistic than any living poet has ever dared to pen—the lines about "the crowded couch of incest in the warrens of the poor"—because that is "rhetoric," and "rhetoric" is a word that your "moderns," with a social passion, will apply to any poet of greater power and broader outlook than their own, even when he is fighting their battles. They forget that there is not only the false rhetoric of the second-rate politician or decadent poet, but also a true rhetoric which throughout the ages has formed part of the highest poetry; that the Greeks of Homer often spoke rhetorically, and that this is no more incompatible with poetry than that they also spoke grammatically. They forget that Rome lives in the rhetoric of the *Aeneid*; that the best of the speeches in "Paradise Lost" are rhetoric, and that a very large proportion of the great familiar passages in Shakespeare can be called rhetoric. Some of them—in "Henry V" for instance—are even (O, hideous intellectual crime!) "patriotic rhetoric"; while, in "Julius Caesar," there is a blaze of rhetorical poetry that ought to make some of our fluttering and fastidious "moderns" shrink like startled fawns. The greatest of his sonnets—like some of the greatest of Wordsworth—are rhetoric. Even in Shelley—and in "Adonais"—the spirit of poetry and the rhetorical form are often inseparable. The "Ode to the West Wind," from its opening apostrophe to its final rhetorical question, might be printed in a textbook on rhetoric, as a classical example of the art of pleading. When men are in earnest about anything, it is sometimes

quite natural for them to plead ; and in such a case it would be bad art to let them do anything else. But facts mean nothing to the parrot, and the parrot-cry " rhetoric " is used simply as an offensive weapon, or to bluff an innocent public into the idea that now, at long last, a coterie has discovered " images," and that everything else is superseded. The sheep who follow the coterie become, as Mr. Gosse said recently, " obsessed with an almost crazy fear of rhetoric," and they might almost as well be afraid of syntax. Indeed, in American anthologies, published by reputable houses, this movement, initiated in England, has even gone so far as the announcement that such and such a work cannot be true poetry, because it is so ultra-conservative as to be grammatical. The demand is for " radical " poets. The word has no political significance in America. It means only poets who can substitute " like " for " as " (in accordance with the captions of the cinematograph), poets who can blunt the fine edge of the language and obliterate the delicate shades and tones, poets who can break down their heritage and use their hob-nailed boots on the memories of their own most illustrious dead. It may be admitted that Longfellow is not a great poet—not nearly so great a poet as the Emerson of the *Threnody*—but there is not a single writer among the so-called " radicals " in America who could write anything comparable for a single moment with Longfellow's introductory sonnet to Dante, or a lyric like that which once fascinated W. E. Henley.

" I remember the black wharfs and the slips  
And the sea-tides tossing free,

And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,  
 And the beauty and mystery of the ships,  
 And the magic of the sea.  
 And the voice of that wayward song  
 Is singing and saying still :  
 ' A boy's will is the wind's will,  
 And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.' "

This may not be poetry of the highest order ; but which of the " radicals " could even approach it, and by what right are dozens of incompetent and dishonest critics confusing all real values and trying to teach the new generation to despise its simple beauty ? There is, of course, no direct connection between the intellectual snobbery that sniffs at Longfellow and the grimmer assault that has been made elsewhere upon what the Bolsheviks call the " literature of the bourgeoisie " ; but the spirit behind these movements is the same, and it is an evil spirit—a spirit of destructive hatred. I have seen the exponents of both movements talking on platforms to men and women engaged in education, and the exponents of both movements are of the same type. They usually have a grudge against civilisation and nearly always an intense hatred of their own country. They are all great enemies of " institutions " ; and, in many cases, they forget that the universe itself is an institution, and bump their heads not only against the laws of civilisation, but also against the laws of Nature. Worst of all, they are frequently praised, almost passionately, by that fine old institution, *The Spectator*. That able editors should exalt this fraternity to the intellectual heights is to play the old game of sacrificing one's allies to the enemy ; and it is time

that some revaluations were made in the contemporary intellectual world.

The almost malignant desire to depreciate the writers of a former generation who, like Tennyson in his landscape work, made technical rivalry difficult, has been accompanied by obvious and amazing ignorance with regard to the quality of his thought in his greatest work and its relation to the thought of his own age. The work of this great poet has been spoken of again and again with the contempt of complete ignorance, and occasionally of malicious perversity. An intellectual world as "sincere" as ours in its desire to set art and literature above every kind of propaganda (except that of its own political or Bolshevistic prejudices) should be able to realise that the landscape work of Tennyson can be enjoyed for its own sake. When a leading "intellectual" dismisses Tennyson and Longfellow together as if they were of equal calibre, it is as if he were to put Gainsborough and Landseer on the same level. It is simply suggesting the thing that is not, and there is no excuse for it. I have even read an attack upon the "shallow thought" of Tennyson in which he was accused of not having faced the fact that Nature was "red in tooth and claw," the writer being beautifully unconscious of the authorship of a phrase which has become one of the chief weapons in the armoury of the modern specialist in pessimism. Even the morality of Tennyson has been impugned as unworthy of the young generation, who were—quite ridiculously—said to be in revolt against it; and, at the same time, in the columns of English journals something happened which is quite without precedent in the history



of any civilised people. I have the documentary evidence here to prove what I am about to assert, and I think the time has come for some plain speaking.

In the current number of the *Quarterly Review* there is a review—an exceedingly able review—of a recently published novel, which I say, without hesitation, and without the slightest fear that anyone here who has seen it will disagree with me, is the foulest that has ever found its way into print. Much of it is obscure, through sheer disorder of the syntax. My attention was first called to it by a column and a half in a leading journal, where it was said to be eagerly awaited by “select literary circles.” I call your particular attention to that phrase. The writer said that its very obscenity was somehow beautiful, and “if this is not high art, what is ?” A weekly journal followed with eight columns, in which the book was compared with Goethe’s “Faust.” The critic who wrote this particular article is one of the most brilliantly gifted of the new generation. I do not make this comment to depreciate those gifts. I make it because I am conscious of them, and of the importance to our literature that gifts of this quality should be used to elucidate and not to confuse values in the minds of his readers. I am concerned, not with personalities, but with truth. I want to say as emphatically as I can that I am making, not an attack, but a plea, for some of those honest simplicities of thought and art which the cynical mood of the hour is obscuring to our national peril. A leading novelist proclaimed the author of the book in question to be a “genius.” Writer after writer took up the word, until the name of the author and “genius”

seemed to be almost inseparable. Even those who shrank from this book acclaimed an earlier work by the same author as that of a "genius," quite unmistakably. (I am quite ready to deal with this matter separately, if necessary; for I have read the book, and it is contemptible in every respect). The *Quarterly Review* is fully justified in printing its exposure of the critics who praised the more insane product, but even the *Quarterly* is unable to tell the whole truth about it. The technical quality of the writing is beneath contempt. An artist at least endeavours to select significant details, but this author simply puts everything in, chaotically. No word or thought conceivable in the gutters of Dublin or the New York Bowery is omitted. There is no criminal court in this country which would not brand the book as inexpressibly degraded; and yet, only last night, in a leading newspaper, I see its author referred to as one of our masters. Weighing every word, I say that, whether we know it or not, this is nothing less than a national disgrace; a disgusting blot upon our national heritage; and it is all the more disgusting in that it took place at a time when some of the noblest work of the last century—work with human faults, but, as in the case of Tennyson, work that may outlive England as Virgil has outlived Rome—work of this quality was being depreciated and treated with a silly and ignorant contempt. One critic, in a leading journal recently, said "we resent" the fine defence of Tennyson recently printed in the transactions of this society. I have not noticed any resentment of this far more serious matter, which absolutely confirms that defence;

for the author of this book in more than one passage echoes the fatuous depreciation of Tennyson.

I have cited the extreme case of this book, because it is a complete reduction to absurdity of what I have called the literary Bolshevism of the hour. The book was exalted as a work of "genius" by a system of mild condemnation—for, of course, it was "condemned"—just as others have been damned by faint praise. It ought to have been simply consigned to a sewer. Intellectual Bolshevism has brought us to a point where work of this kind is, even if condemned, regarded as work of "genius," while we may wait indefinitely before we find the leading reviews dealing properly with some of our best contemporary fiction. Let me make it quite clear that I cite this extreme case only because there are a thousand gradations of shadow before this blackest depth is reached; and it is most imperative that attention should be called through this particular example to the thousands of other cases which are merely of the same tendency; and to the gross incompetence or cynicism of certain sections of metropolitan "criticism." The book itself is utterly worthless and beneath consideration; and it is too corrupt to have more than a brief and surreptitious existence. But what concerns us all, and most urgently demands consideration, is the appalling fact that a very large section of our metropolitan criticism—the section which is called "intellectual" and is most vocal—should have treated the works of this author as works of genius simultaneously with the condemnation of some of our noblest literature. A leading French critic said: "With this book Ireland makes a sensational re-entry

into the high literature of Europe." And some of those metropolitan journals which are responsible for the formation of opinion in this country and allow their literary columns to advocate what they editorially condemn, accepted the statement with the characteristic respect which these literary rebels against authority will pay to every authority on earth except that of truth and right. The result is deadly to literature, for it confuses all real values in the minds of the new generation. It is not the young; it is not the new generation in revolt that is responsible for this confusion. The confusion is produced by the cynical, sophisticated, middle-aged or elderly pseudo-intellectual, sitting in London, and stimulating his jaded senses with the abnormal and the corrupt. They tell the young that these things are the hallmark of genius, and the young are bewildered.

Genius! What do these men know of genius?—the clear water of the spring at the door, the water stirred by the wing of the angel, the Spirit moving where it listeth, and speaking, not through the lips of those whom the sophisticated would choose, but through the lips of the child, and the lover, and the poet. I open the pages of one of the poets whom they delight to dishonour, as having no word for our own time, and I read :

“ The year’s at the Spring,  
 The day’s at the Morn,  
 Morning’s at seven,  
 The hill-side’s dew-pearled,  
 The lark’s on the wing,  
 The snail’s on the thorn.  
 God’s in His heaven,  
 All’s right with the world.”

That is genius! The power, in eight lines, to reintegrate a disordered world, by relating all its scattered and fragmentary tones to the central and eternal harmony.

A good deal of scorn has been poured upon the last two lines of this poem and the intellect of its author, by those who have forgotten or never known that it had any context, and that it occurs immediately after one of the most vivid murder scenes in poetry. Browning deliberately paints the world in its blackest and most evil disorder before he gives you that exquisite moment in which he reintegrates it and shows you once more "the glory of the sum of things."

That basis of the universe in an ultimate harmony is the first postulate of all thought, all science, all art, all literature. Without it there is nothing left to us that has the slightest meaning. And, indeed, a large part of our modern literature does seem to have reached that final stage of negation. It has reduced the world to dust and ashes and left it there. It has turned from the world in its completeness; turned from the world that contained the souls of Shakespeare and Beethoven, and insisted on pointing us to the dust and ashes in which it says that these and our whole universe must end. It has turned from the things which we *do* know about the greatness of human life (for if we have any inward life at all we have experienced them), those great factors which can only be referred to something greater than themselves, some divine power at the heart of the universe, and has declared that all these things are illusion; while, in the name of realism, it has occupied itself with the

dust of which we know nothing, except that, under the scrutiny of science, it does indeed become an insubstantial pageant.

Some of the most notable figures in contemporary literature have been telling us or basing all their work on the assumption that the world is an accident; and it has been made one of the tests of a man's power in art and literature that he should be able to state a negative and despairing philosophy in a new and startling way, without the slightest regard to its truth, or to anything but its value as a means of impressing careless readers with the intellectual greatness of the author. For such writers as these, the secret of great poetry, the poetry in which Matthew Arnold could affirm that our race would come to find a surer and surer stay, would seem to be lost. And what is that secret?

Perhaps the truest and most comprehensive description of the nature of poetry (and by poetry I mean the essential substance of all the arts) was made by Wordsworth, in some sentences that sound curiously remote from the present day, and yet are worthy of the closest attention, even from the charmingly sophisticated young lady who conducts the poetry columns of that wildly anarchistic and rebellious journal *The Spectator*. "The religious man," he wrote, "values what he sees, chiefly as an imperfect shadowing forth of what he is incapable of seeing. The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without resting a great part of the burden on words and symbols, by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates Himself

to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between poetry and religion."

All creative art, in other words, is consciously or unconsciously symbolical, and the mistake that has been made by modern realism lies not in its insistence upon "images" of superficial details and appearances, but in merely reporting them without regard to their significance as shadows of the eternal reality, or the possibility of using them as images of that beauty which is also truth. This is the sole aim of all the true poets and of every imaginative artist. Their songs and tales are, in their most tragic and in their lightest vein, touched with a gleam from a world beyond our own. For what is tragedy? It is not a declaration of universal futility, a description of the painful things that may happen to an Accident from Nowhere or the annihilation of a meaningless toad under a nonsensical harrow. It is perhaps a farewell to everything in the world that we know, but it is at the same time a welcome to the heavenly powers. All great tragedy surveys the world under the eternal aspect; and, though it may be able to affirm nothing of the world beyond, it is in its very agony a postulation of that world. If you turn to the poets in their lighter vein you will find that Wordsworth's theory still holds true. When Toby Belch and Andrew Aguecheek call on the Fool to give them a song in "Twelfth Night," he suddenly lifts above their half-witted and half-drunken mirth one of the most exquisite of all the brief songs of youth and love in the whole range of literature :

"O Mistress mine, where are you roaming?

O stay and hear. Your true love's coming,

That can sing both high and low.  
 Trip no further, pretty sweeting.  
 Journeys end in lovers meeting,  
 Every wise man's son doth know."

And in those lines there is a deep undertone of music which conveys far more than the superficial meaning. It is an instance of how the poet, as well as the musician, can take three sounds and make of them, not a fourth sound, but a star. He is dealing not only with terrestrial journeys, but with the journey to that land beyond our horizons, the land where all roads meet. It has a profound metaphysical meaning, though it is touched in as lightly by the hand of the master as a butterfly settles on a flower. The meaning is conveyed by the music; and it is not to be estimated as one estimates the content of a sentence in a scientific textbook. But it is just this undertone of music that differentiates this poem from the mere drawing-room ballad, and exalts it to the realms of great art. It is just this undertone of music that the destructive minds in modern literature have never been able to create, to understand, or even to hear. When he speaks of the "true love that can sing both high and low," there is a suggestion of that music which George Meredith heard rolling through the universe from the heights to the depths, and from devils to angels; and the distance from which we hear it, the lightness of touch with which it is rendered, does not prevent our recognition of it. Though it is hardly more definite or less clear than a glance of the eye, it is in its own way an appeal to—

"That Light whose smile kindles the universe,  
 That Beauty in which all things live and move."



Coming nearer to our own period it would be easy to show how the theory of Wordsworth holds good for poet after poet. It has nothing to do with any didactic system. Wordsworth himself exemplified it nowhere better than when he first struck the note of that neo-paganism which developed later into the religion of beauty of Swinburne and his contemporaries :

“ So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn,  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.”

The fire was caught from the hands of Wordsworth by that greatest literary artist of the 19th century whose name, until quite recently, it was hardly permissible to mention in certain intellectual circles. I mean, of course, Tennyson. The strongest of contemporary writers, Mr. Kipling, once wrote in answer to a line of praise from Tennyson : “ When the private in the ranks is praised by his general he does not presume to thank him, but he fights the better the next day.” Mr. Kipling’s early letter to Tennyson should, I think, be inscribed on the title-page of that complete study of modern poetry for which we are waiting. The new gospel of to-day, of course, is “ intellectual arrogance.” But self-conceit is a poor substitute even for youthful hero-worship, and a still poorer substitute for the gratitude and affection which filled the eyes of Southey in the presence of his never-failing friends—the mighty dead. There were many among the new intolerants who were bewildered by Mr. Saintsbury’s recent inclusion of Tennyson among the twelve greatest writers of the world ; but their

bewilderment has no remedy unless they are prepared to read, with proper care, a certain poem called "In Memoriam." It is probably the greatest elegy in any language, not because this or that authority says so, but demonstrably.

It is the greatest because there is no other to compare with it in range of thought, or in the exquisite delicacy and quiet strength of its craftsmanship. But its thought must be examined in its proper historical relationship and strength must not be confused with crudity or the mere absence of light and shade.

Most important of all, there is no other to compare with it in the unfailing pulse of that profound music which flows from the source of all great poetry. In eight lines he can give you a pageant of the process through which this planet has passed; he can give it with the scientific precision of a Huxley and the profound music of a Lucretius. The simplicity of the words in those eight lines (they are almost all of one syllable) has doubtless misled many of our moderns into thinking that their moving tide is asleep :

" There rolls the deep, where grew the tree,  
O earth, what changes hast thou seen ?  
There, where the long street roars, hath been  
The stillness of the central sea.

" The hills are shadows, and they flow  
From form to form, and nothing stands.  
They pass like clouds, the solid lands.  
Like clouds they shape themselves and go."

We may not all be able to affirm our clear vision of the goal to which Tennyson affirmed that universal

pageant to be moving—but all the true poets, from the greatest to the least, have allowed us to see their music flowing in the same direction. Brooks and rivers, they all flow onward to that one immortal sea. Stevenson allows you to see it, even in his “Child’s Garden of Verses”—a perfect example of how the poet can use small things to shadow forth greater things :

“ *How far is it to Babylon ?*

Ah ! far enough, my dear,

Far, far away from here.

Yet you are further gone.

“ *Can I get there by candle-light ?*

So goes the old refrain.

I do not know. Perchance you might.

But only children, hear it right,

Ah, never to return again.

The eternal dawn without a doubt,

Shall break o’er hill and plain,

And put all stars and candles out,

Ere we be young again.”

You find him summing up the whole philosophy of his art, and arriving at the same conclusion as Wordsworth, Browning and Tennyson, in that wonderful little prose poem addressed to W. E. Henley :

“ *Sursum corda !*

Heave ahead ;

Here’s luck !

Art, and blue Heaven,

April and God’s larks,

Green reeds and the sky-scattering river,

A stately music

Enter God.”

“ Ah, but you know,” he continued, “ until a man can write that ‘ Enter God ’ he has made no art, none ! Come, let us take counsel together and make some.”

You find him carrying out his theory even in verses so purely literary as those which he addresses to the Muse :

- “ Resign the rhapsody, the dream  
 To men of larger reach ;  
 Be ours the quest of a plain theme,  
 The piety of speech.
- “ As monkish scribes from morning break  
 Toiled till the close of light,  
 Nor thought a day too long to make  
 One line or letter bright.
- “ Till last, when round the house we hear  
 The evensong of birds,  
 One corner of blue heaven appear  
 In our clear well of words.”

That glimpse of the sky is all that is needed to corroborate the theory of Wordsworth, and I do not for a moment mean to suggest that poetry and art have any direct didactic function to exercise. We find the same piety of speech directed to the same end in work which at first sight might seem to be primarily concerned with the revival of an interesting literary form, as, for instance, Mr. Edmund Gosse’s “ Ballade of Dead Cities,” where the same suggestion of an infinite horizon touches the forgotten walls and towers with the light of poetry. Another modern poet has shown us how even our modern machinery lends itself to the uses of poetry, how indeed it may be treated as a kind of micro-cosmic

symbol of the universal processes. As in McAndrew's hymn—

“They're all awa', full power, true beat, the clanging  
chorus goes  
Clear to the tunnel where they sit, my purrin' dynamos,  
Interdependence absolute, foreseen, ordained, decreed,  
To work, ye'll note, at any tilt an' every rate of speed.  
Fra sky-light-lift to furnace-bars, backed, bolted, braced  
and stayed,  
And singing like the Mornin' Stars for joy that they are  
made.”

It would be possible to give many examples from the best of contemporary poetry to show that all art at its finest passes beyond the material facts of this world and lays up its treasure elsewhere. There are, of course, forms of art which are purely decorative and at the same time fully justify their existence, but even these, in their rhythms and harmonies, are a part of and blend imperceptibly into the larger music of art and the universe. I am speaking here, however, of those developments of art and literature in which the human spirit has expressed itself at its fullest and greatest.

In summing up, it can be said with perfect truth that never in the history of the world was there a time so fraught with danger to the great heritage that we have received from the past. Our literature shares that peril. We see the signs of an ignorant Bolshevism, often—as one of its exponents has confessed—deliberately ungrammatical, taking upon itself to dismiss not only all former metrical English poetry, but the metrical poetry of all the ages, on the ground that those who cannot spell or master the elementary

technique of their art have nevertheless attained to a subtler truth of expression. Again and again it is affirmed by superficial critics, whose tastes seem to have been formed by the cinematograph, that the crude language of a drunkard in a pothouse is a more vital and subtle means of expression ("red-blooded" is, I believe, the phrase) than the English language as used by the masters, with their exquisitely delicate shades of meaning and their infinitely subtle and precise tones and semi-tones. In America this movement has gone further than in England; but its initial impulse was given by weary critics in search of a new sensation on this side of the water, and they are frequently hailed as masters in our own literary columns. One of the leaders of this school in America recently published, in a leading American journal, the following typical "poem":

"My shirt is a token and a symbol  
more than a lover for sun and rain  
my shirt is a signal  
and a teller of souls.

"I can take off my shirt and tear it,  
and so make a ripping razzly noise,  
and the people will say,

" 'Look at him tear his shirt.'  
I can keep my shirt on.  
I can stick around and sing like a little bird  
and look 'em all in the eye and never be fazed.  
I can keep my shirt on."

"These men," said John Burroughs, one of the finest of modern American writers, in commenting on this "poem," "claim to get their charter from

Whitman. I do not think he would be interested enough to feel contempt for them. These men are the 'Reds' of literature. They would reverse or destroy all the recognised rules and standards upon which literature is founded."

I am quoting, of course, an extreme case here, but the author of this work is frequently spoken of with immense reverence by poets and critics who ought to know better. There is little danger of work of this kind imposing itself upon the larger public. The danger is not so direct as that. The danger—and it is a very real one—arises from the fact that a very large part of the metropolitan criticism in both England and America has grown weary and cynical, and likes to amuse itself by waving aside its proper task and confusing the minds of the new generation by suggesting that to be new and unlike anything that has ever gone before is the sole aim of any artist worth his salt. It is only in time of rigid order that the destructive mind is really useful, and even then it is only useful as a means to an end—the construction of something better. The destructive mind can only exist when it is in a very small minority. As soon as it is in the majority the civilisation by which it is produced comes to an end. At the present moment the destructive mind in literature is popular, fashionable. It is the conventional thing to be a rebel, and the rebels are patronised by the *Spectator*. In fact the whole ground has shifted under our feet during the last ten years: and unless we realise that a revision of values is necessary, with some attention to the changes in the meaning of our former literary labels, there will be nothing but chaos in

literary criticism for the next few years. We want all the new ideas, and especially all the new achievements, that the New Age can give us ; but one can hardly be regarded as a reactionary, even by the *Spectator*, if one asserts that our great new cities will not be built any the more quickly if we devote our energies to the destruction of Westminster Abbey. The predominance of the destructive mind in what I have called certain sections of metropolitan criticism is closely connected with that loss of the central position, that loss of a belief in the fundamental harmony of things of which I spoke earlier. It has become the fashion to estimate a man's power in art and literature by his ability to suggest the utter futility of human effort and the ultimate meaninglessness of the universe. There is, of course, a shallow optimism ; but I do not know that it is any more common than a shallow pessimism. I do not know that it is any easier to be optimistic at the present day than to be pessimistic. Those who take the view that, ultimately, nothing matters, are of little value in any department of life, and certainly they cannot produce the greatest art. If the universe is meaningless, so must be the art produced by it. There is, of course, a profound pessimism ; but its depths are not sounded by the discovery that there is a skeleton an inch beneath the skin of man. There is a profound pessimism in the Book of Ecclesiastes, but the greatest word of that Book is not in the proclamation that all is vanity, but in the moment where the writer is caught up into the universal harmony, and calls upon youth not to revolt but to remember, and does so in the



recurrent rhythms of poetry : “ Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.”

We are sometimes told that those of us who profoundly disagree with the philosophy of futility must not venture to criticise or state our reasons for disagreeing with the eminent intellects who proclaim it ; but, if the appeal to authority is to hold good in this curiously self-contradictory era of rebellion, I for one am quite ready to make my appeal to the highest name of all in literature. Those who affirm that, because beauty fades and youth perishes, we are all the puppets of a meaningless power, were answered in anticipation, three hundred years ago, by the greatest of all dramatic poets, speaking, not through one of his characters, but through his own lips and from his own ever-living soul, and affirming that above all our tempests there is an ever-fixèd mark, a star “ whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.”

“ Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle’s compass come.  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out, even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me proved  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.”

We talk of giving the new generation its opportunity, and our cynics are laying upon its shoulders the heaviest and dreariest burden the young have ever been called upon to bear. We are giving them only one-half of the message of their profoundest pessimist, the half that can choke their souls with

dust. We are telling them that dust ends all; we call on great contemporary names in literature to emphasise it and to silence the reply of their own hearts, and they are not always able to summon up that vast cloud of witness which in all ages has pointed the human spirit to a realm beyond these voices. The editors of journals concerned with literature are making the most stupendous mistake if they think that the little metropolitan coteries who have been substituting cleverness for feeling, and sophisticated brutality for the simplicities of our fathers, in any way represent the great majority of the public, or even that part of it which reads literature. The claims of some of the new rebels to be representative of the modern spirit appear to be based on the extreme smallness of the sales of their books; but this does not prevent a disastrous confusion of values if editors of journals do not realise this and are not alive to their responsibilities. One of the great difficulties is that the critics who ought to be safeguarding the best of our literature are the very men in whom familiarity with it has induced weariness and a desire for anything that will tickle or scorch their jaded palates. But this is not what their audiences may justly require of them. The new generation is being confused from above and misled even by "educational" introductions to literature. It is quite ridiculous to suggest that the young men of this generation are themselves in revolt against the masterpieces of literature of the nineteenth century. I have had the opportunity of addressing audiences of many thousands of students in the colleges of the New World, and I have seen them again and again kindling to the work

of poets like Wordsworth, Browning and Tennyson, when they are given the faintest chance of appreciating it. Not one young man in ten thousand, among those capable of appreciating literature, will revolt against even the familiar poem, four lines of which may be taken almost as a description of Tennyson's own work :

“ Such a tide as moving seems asleep  
Too full for sound or foam  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.”

But our metropolitan journals have been dinning into their ears that there is no knowledge or device in the past that can help them, and no real hope in the future to which they are going. I know of nothing sadder than the sight of the young trying to conceal the intellectual wounds that the elderly cynics have inflicted upon them ; for the quiet sadness of many of the more thoughtful of the younger generation arises from that bitterest and most desolate feeling of the human heart—“ They have taken away my Master, and I know not where they have laid him.”



## THE CENTENARY OF SHELLEY.

BY PROFESSOR PAUL DE REUL.

[Read June 13th, 1922.]

My first word will be one of thanks for the kind words just spoken of my country and of myself, and for the great honour done to me in inviting me to speak before this audience.

My second word will be one of apology for accepting the invitation. It seems indeed very conceited, nay, almost impudent for a foreigner to come and speak in an un-English voice, and in no style in the least worthy of the subject, on a great English poet before the most refined English literary public, and before a poet like Sir Henry Newbolt. Let me say that I should not have accepted, but for the occasion of a centenary which allows me to present, not a real lecture that should teach you anything, but the homage of a foreigner (and perhaps interesting as such) to the great poet whom it is natural that we should remember at this time of the century and of the year.

To prevent disappointment, I must also warn you that this tribute will be in the way of criticism, not of unmitigated praise or lyrical description of a romantic life and death already well known and often told.

Centenaries of great men are becoming an institution. But if it is to do any good, if it is not to degene-

rate into a ceremonial of conventional eulogy, we ought to improve the occasion of a centenary anniversary by attempting a judgment, calm and impartial, definitive—as far as human things can be—of the hero we are celebrating.

Now Shelley has been praised more than judged or criticised, and it is quite natural that it should be so. His fame had been totally eclipsed by that of Byron. Shelley thought more highly of “the Pilgrim of Eternity” than of himself. Byron burned his body on the coast of Viareggio, but this was the first honour ever paid to him. He died practically unknown. Young Browning, discovering “the atheist poet,” had some difficulty in procuring his works. Tennyson learned his name only at Cambridge. Complete editions of his works did not appear for about twenty years.

But by-and-by a reaction set in in his favour, and continued steadily. One landmark of it is Browning’s little poem, “Memorabilia”:

“Ah, did you once see Shelley plain  
And did he stop and speak to you?”

The reaction reached its climax about the ninth decade of the last century. Adverse criticism such as M. Arnold’s (with his “ineffectual angel”) had been so awkwardly beside the mark that it rather strengthened the universal admiration.

Yet it is time, I think, that we should no longer admire Shelley indiscriminately, and I am going to set myself to the pedantic task of taking and leaving, of weighing *pros* and *cons*. Let it be said to devout

Shelleyans that I do it only to ease my critical conscience, and to leave me free to admire him the more afterwards. We want to establish his fame on the most solid basis, to make it shine as a flame on an altar. Therefore we must separate the pure metal from the dross, or, like his own West Wind, blow on his dead leaves and separate them from the living ones.

For beside the living parts of his work I find long tracts of dry land—trying allegories and abstractions, not only in his juvenile “Queen Mab” but in “The Revolt of Islam,” parts of “Prometheus,” of “Julian and Maddalo,” of “Epipsychidion”—indeed in all his longer poems; and many people will perhaps agree that a full enjoyment, a complete satisfaction, must rather be derived from his short poems and *passages* of the long ones.

Now, if we were asked what is wanting in these dry tracts, I think we might reply, without hesitating: a more direct and intimate contact with life, with reality, with nature—in one word, that little grain of realism which seems indispensable even in the most ethereal poetry.

I am well aware that the defect I am speaking of is, to a certain extent, the defect of a quality; but that the defect was not necessary, not unavoidable, is sufficiently proved by his universally admired masterpieces such as the “Hymn to Mont Blanc,” the “Euganean Hills,” the “Skylark,” the “Cloud,” the “West Wind” and the fourth act of “Prometheus” where he *did* remain in contact with Nature, as I wish he had done more often.

Shelley's excessive contempt for reality is shown

in his private life, in his poetical theory, finally in the form and matter of his poetry.

In his private life it is shown in a delightfully picturesque way, but certainly it is manifested by a want of judgment or psychology as regards men or women of his own personal feelings. I am not going to defend the Oxford dons who rusticated him for his pamphlet on "The Necessity of Atheism." Either they read and did not understand, or they were scared by the title even from reading it. Yet what simplicity in Shelley to send copies to the Bishops with a view to convert them ! What candour again, when he discovers that his revered master, William Godwin, is a living author, to write to him about his discovery :

"I had enrolled your name in the list of the honourable dead !"

We know his absurd marriage and the rupture of it. I doubt whether the light thrown on this affair by the full publication of his journals will be much in favour of Shelley's judgment when he tried to lay that unction to his soul that Harriet had been false to him. If he really believed she had been, would he have written that extraordinary letter from Troyes in France, where he invites her to join him and Mary Godwin with whom he had eloped ?

Shelley was almost a saint in his devotion to ideals, sometimes in his devotion to the sick and poor. But with women he could be selfish and unjust. He clothed them with imaginary virtues which he rebuked them afterwards for wanting. He embraced "a cloud instead of Juno" and accused the cloud.



He had no sense of fact, could not well distinguish a fact from an illusion, which occasionally gives him an appearance of insincerity. Shall I remind you, for the sake of picturesqueness, that neither had he any due regard for dinner? In his vegetarian period he would at any time of day or night cut a slice of bread and sprinkle it with dry currants kept loose in his waistcoat-pocket.

But let us revert to more serious matters—I mean Shelley's view of the poet's character, set out in his 'Defence of Poetry.'

Poetry is not so much for him an expression of life according to the laws of beauty as a revelation, an intuition, a sixth sense, an openness to that divine influx, inspiration :

“It is an error to assert that the fine passages of poetry are produced by labour or study. The toil and delay recommended by critics means no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments.”

It will be noticed that this theory, inasmuch as it neglects art, considered as a controlling power over inspiration, makes little difference between the lyric and the mystic. Shelley has the lyrical cry; but sometimes the cry is over-acute: its intensity seems abnormal, morbid, febrile; you think of a musical instrument that breaks by overstringing :

“I pant, I tremble, I expire . . .”

These flights are indeed priceless when the poet stops at the height of them, on the borders of ecstasy, or even when he describes with melodious sadness his falls from them, like a rocket falling back in a

golden shower, or in his own image, like a flying swan shot by an arrow.

But not always does he stop in time. Often he goes on, hypnotised as it were by the white light that dazzles him. Then his imagination works in the void, then I myself who, in France, always defend the rights of romanticism and lyricism, must confess that Shelley makes me at times feel the weakness of a conception of poetry based on inspiration only. At least, this conception should be put into concrete form as in Edgar Allan Poe's 'Poetic Principle' (which Poe was wrong in applying to *all* poetry). "As a poem," says Poe (he means, of course, a lyrical poem) "deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites by elevating the soul," as "all excitements are through a psychical necessity transient . . . I maintain that a *long poem* is a flat contradiction in terms." This principle Shelley overlooked in writing long poems not exactly uninspired but having only a second-rate inspiration, half-lucid, "hectic," as he might say. We understand Keats' criticism: "I wish you would curb your magnanimity a little and be more of an artist,"—*magnanimity* being here a euphemism for an inspiration too confident, too sure of itself.

And Shelley recognised this defect, for if he could not always read his own private feelings, as a poet he knew himself well, and he wrote to Godwin (11 Dec., 1817):

"I cannot but be conscious, in much of what I write, of an absence of that tranquillity which is the attribute and accompaniment of Power."

The result is seen in his style, which (laying aside his

sovereignty in rhythms) is not so entirely genuine as that of Keats, and does not always shake off the abstract phraseology of the eighteenth century, especially when he declaims against priests and kings, whom he calls hierarchs and anarchs. His syntax can be loose, and even incorrect. He is haunted by certain images or symbols, such as his *barks* carried away by torrents ("Alastor," "Revolt of Islam," "Witch of Atlas"), his *caves* and above all his *meteors*, which he introduces everywhere. A trick of his which he repeats with monotony is a comparison where a certain quality is reflected in itself—"looping the loop," if I may dare to say so, as "A lady (or a rose) garmented in the light of her own beauty."

In order to sustain his long poems, the poet must needs invent a story and persons or characters. Shelley's persons are too often mere abstractions, hours and dreams personified :

". . . Desires and Adorations,  
Winged Persuasions and veiled Destinies . . .  
And Sorrow, with her family of Sighs,  
And Pleasure, blind with tears, led by the gleam,  
Of her own dying smile . . ."

Among these nonentities we feel by-and-by uncomfortable: we seem to keep—

"With phantoms an unprofitable strife."

Think again of that long allegory or rather conundrum in "Epipsychidion" where the Sun, the Moon, the Comet, respectively represent Emilia Viviani, Mary Godwin and a third woman, not identified.

These I call allegories rather than symbols, as being images not connected by an organic link with some

living spot in our memory. They are often too vague to have either life or plastic beauty. They may also be very precise, but of a precision no more vivid than in an hallucination, a dream or a nightmare. It is quite fitting that Demogorgon in "Prometheus" should be described vaguely as "a mighty darkness, without form or outline." But a little further this mighty darkness is described as "filling the seat of power," and as mounting into a chariot!

The "Triumph of Life," in spite of its splendid beginning, partakes of the nightmare, with its blind charioteer, and its old root with grass-like hair, with holes like eyes, which represents — Jean Jacques Rousseau.

To sustain his long poems, the poet must also invent a story. Here he is weak, for as he had no sense of fact, he had none of causality, of the linking of facts—in one word, no historical sense, either in his politics or in his story-telling.

Of course we ought to allow free rein to a poet's fancy. He is not bound by physical laws. He may disintegrate the Universe and re-combine its parts with freedom. When Shakespeare places an ass's head on the shoulders of Bottom, we are pleased, nay delighted: but why are we? Because there is some truth in that madness. Because an ass's head so suits Bottom's character that he hardly seems to have had his head changed. But when in "The Witch of Atlas," which is Shelley's "Midsummer Night's Dream," the Witch concocts with fire, and snow, and "liquid love," a certain Hermaphrodite, some of us may be less charmed than bewildered.

It would be unfair, it would look like a parody to

tell the story of the "Revolt of Islam." Let me just remind you of the first canto or prelude.

A poet, from the strand, sees in the air a fight between the snake and the eagle. The snake (a rather misleading symbol which represents Right) drops on the strand, finds a woman beautiful as morning and coils at her feet. Presently poet, woman and snake make in an enchanted boat an enchanted voyage to a marvellous temple. Here we see crawling on the ground two glittering lights like "serpent's eyes" and like "meteors"; they dilate, commingle, become "a planet" hanging over a cloud, which rests on a "crystalline throne" (st. 56). Out of the cloud emerge two radiant forms, by which is meant, we suppose, the apotheosis of the hero and heroine of the poem, Laon and Cythna, of whom no mention has yet been made.

Is this really fine or simply bizarre? Is it a poet's dream or a sleeper's dream?

It would again be unfair, and like a parody, to tell the plot of "Prometheus," stripped of its divine music. One point may be adduced as the strangest. When the Spirit of the Hour who accompanied in his car Demogorgon on his way to dethrone Jupiter reports on his mission, he feels obliged to tell us what he has done with his car and horses. The coursers have gone back to the Sun where they "pasture flowers or vegetable fire." The car has been placed in a beautiful round temple, elaborately described, and before that car an imitation of the horses has been placed, and these sham-horses are bound to the car, not by traces, but by an amphisbaenic snake (III, i, 119-121).

Are we awake or sleeping? This looks like somnambule poetry, almost like a case for Dr. Freud's psycho-analysis. Perhaps there is some hidden meaning, some connection with Shelley's subconsciousness, but the link is lost, there being no background of reality in common between his subconsciousness and ours.

I have now reached a point where I feel that I am becoming odious to all of you, where I myself feel disgusted with my attempt to be impartial, and it is with a real relief that I pass on to a more grateful aspect of my subject.

True Shelleyans, of whom I am one, can concede much and yet remain unshaken in their faith. They know that, after Shelley's obscure and tangled passages, they will hear again the inimitable accent, breathe again the inimitable soul, soar again in that blessed region, almost superior to art,

“Where music and moonlight and feeling are one.”

And yet that ideal world is not mere mysticism. It does belong to art, in spite of Keats—by virtue of the images, but chiefly of the rhythm. In the realm of rhythm Shelley is the liberator, the great spontaneous creator. If the poetry of Keats reminds us of the most gorgeous painting—say of Giorgione—the poetry of Shelley is music. If you cannot quote from Shelley, as you can from Keats, many single lines where “every rift is loaded with ore,” that is because with Shelley single lines are only a means to an end—they are *wings*, properly wings, that sustain

his flight, and allow him access to that upper sky where the skylark pours her full heart.

The composition of "Prometheus" is nothing if not musical. The transition from scene to scene seems feeble and artificial as long as you have not realised that the scenes are bound by an inner link, as the various phases of one musical thought. Shelley is musical even to the technicalities of style. The Earth, speaking of Prometheus, says,

"Our refuge, our defence lies fallen and vanquishèd."

The poet wants to emphasise the impression as a musician might do, by a sustained chord, and he has the last words, "fallen and vanquishèd," successively repeated by two personified echoes which have no other purpose.

Again, in the first scene, Prometheus desires the Mountains, Springs and Winds to repeat the curse which he once uttered against Jupiter. They say in substance, "We could repeat it, but dare not." But they express it, anthem-like, twice over, each of them in turn first leaving in suspense the end of the response.

Shelley turns verse into music by the rapid indivisible flight of his lines, by his elusive charm, by the total fusion of sound and sense, by his divine madness, and above all by the gift of expressing pure emotion, or rather the soul itself in its motion. I know only one poet by whom this approximation of poetry to music has been carried even farther—Swinburne, on whom I happen to have just published a big book.\*

\* *L'Oeuvre de Swinburne* (Oxford University Press).

As it was not Swinburne's centenary, and I had not to be so strict with him as with Shelley, I may seem to have overrated him. Let me therefore here declare that if Swinburne is the more complete musician, Shelley is the purer musician as he is the purer soul; Shelley generally refrains from descriptive or imitative music, which is after all a sort of painting. Swinburne is a virtuoso whose wings are sometimes weighed down by too much matter—I mean too much sound. He is the seamew, skimming the salt wave; Shelley, the skylark, lost in the ether.

I have, perhaps, sufficiently defined his poetical temperament—musical, soaring, ardent.

Let us now see to what subjects this fiery genius was applied. Since Matthew Arnold deplored “the incurable want in his poetry of a sound subject matter,” it may be worth stating that his first and main subject was simply the divine, the absolute, the infinite—God, although he does not use that name.

He calls it “Spirit of beauty, the One, the Unborn and Undying”; more often, like his master Plato, he calls it “Love.” He pursues it under an allegorical form in “Alastor,” adores it in “Adonais,” and, “under the radiant veil of a woman,” in “Epi-psychidion,” which must decidedly be reckoned as a poem of sacred rather than profane love.

It is the same spirit which he looks for in humanity, the second of his great themes. Now, humanity with him does not mean individual men and women, nor, as with Pope or Voltaire, the collection of all human beings. It is already the one great Being whom we shall find in the religion of Auguste Comte, or, with differences, in Swinburne's “Hymn of Man.”



Of this conception Shelley is the creator, and I believe the fact has not been noticed before :

“ Man, oh not men ! a chain of linkèd thought,  
Of love and might to be divided not . . .  
Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,  
Whose nature is its own divine control.”

These lines are from “ Prometheus Unbound,” where Shelley, as a thinker, appears at his greatest.

May I be allowed to say that this grand philosophical poem has been rather misunderstood by Shelley’s chief biographer, Professor Dowden. “ Humanity,” says Dowden, “ is no chained Titan of indomitable virtue. It is a weak and trembling thing which yet through error and weakness, traversed and overcome, may at last grow strong. To represent evil as external, the tyranny of a malignant God, is to falsify the true conception of human progress.”

Under the sentimental, semi-puritanical tone dear to the age when these lines were written you will detect two mistakes. Shelley does not represent evil as external. For gods are the creation of man ; they are oppressive fictions. Prometheus, or the human mind, gave omnipotence not exactly to brute force, but to force untempered by love—

“ Gave wisdom which is strength to Jupiter.”

And no more than Shelley represents evil as external does he say, as implied by Dowden, that salvation is by revolution only. For when is Prometheus unbound ? Not when he invents the arts and sciences, not when he curses Jupiter ; but when

he retracts his curse, when, renouncing hatred, he wishes—

“No living thing to suffer pain.”

Not by revolution, therefore but by an inner conversion to love, in the old Christian way which some Christians fail to recognise, are Prometheus and the whole world with him regenerated.

The third object of Shelley's poetry is Nature.

A new philosophical influence, that of Spinoza, here counterbalances that of Plato. It enhances the value of the visible world, whereas Plato rather induced Shelley mentally to shatter into pieces that “dome of many-coloured glass” that “stains the white radiance of eternity.” But Shelley (did Goethe help him to it ?) takes one step further than Spinoza : for him the soul or substance of the Universe is motion, life, activity, desire. Few poets have had a like feeling of the Universal, of the world as a whole and a like gift of forgetting themselves in that whole.

This is the difference between him and Wordsworth—of course his predecessor as a modern interpreter of Nature. Wordsworth sees in Nature only those attributes of calm and permanence that make himself comfortable. His interested optimism is too much contradicted by modern science to carry conviction to us. Shelley, on the contrary, sees very clearly the two sides of Nature, permanence and change or destruction. His *Mont Blanc*, for instance, is—

“Still, snowy and serene,”

but is also to him, as to the modern geologist, a huge mass of ruin. Flowers, in “*The Sensitive*

Plant," have their bloom and their decay. Nature, in "Prometheus," is subject to evil as much as man. Wordsworth never forgets himself, but Shelley *becomes* the Sensitive Plant or the Skylark, or the West Wind; he *is* the cloud who says "I change, but I cannot die"; he *is* the Earth whirling through space, or the moon spinning with amorous rapture round the earth.

Do you know anything like this grand passage from the fourth act of "Prometheus"? Have you met elsewhere such cosmic intoxication? or, outside of Beethoven, such a hymn to joy? Can it not be said that the soul of the poet for a moment really inhabits the axis of this whirling universe?

Now he who could so lose himself in the vastest and vaguest objects could also penetrate with as much sympathy as Wordsworth, and with more exquisite refinement, the frailest and most delicate. He knew that miraculous ubiquity of his soul. "I am formed," he wrote to Godwin, "to consider the moral or material universe as a whole . . . and to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling." He who could grasp the world in its unity could also divine the infinite complexity of organic life. He could find a world in the eyes of Asia—

"Orb within orb and line through line inwoven"

—or in the green heaven formed by tangled stems of flowers, which he explored, so to speak, down to their cellular recesses. He is the great master of the poetry of plant-life. Not the skylark only, but perhaps even more the Sensitive Plant is an accurate symbol of our poet.

Since we know what he loves in Nature, let us examine *how* he renders it.

I must here correct a previous statement. I said that he was more a musician than painter. Yet he is a painter in some way—not the way of Keats or of Giorgione, but of the later impressionists.

The poet of skies and sunsets, “the Turner of poetry,” will describe a forest as

“A maze of life and light and motion,”

the full tide as

“A plane of light between two Heavens of azure,”

and a falling wave as

“Light dissolved in star-showers.”

He is a luminous impressionist because he is an idealist, and nothing is so ideally poetical as these effects of light and air.

One peculiarity of his style is the art of mixed metaphors or transpositions from one sense into another. Many poets use them, but in Shelley they are deeply ingrained with his philosophy of Nature, his dynamic conception of the Universe. Because he sees all things continually flowing in to each other—weaving and unweaving themselves, to use his favourite phrase—it seems natural for him to translate any given impression into an equivalent, to speak of the purple light of autumn as—

“a soft and purple mist

Like a vaporous amethyst

Or an air-dissolved star

Mingling light and fragrance far ; ”

to compare—

“ Music when soft voices die ”

to—

“ Odours when sweet violets sicken ” ;

or, mixing moral with physical impressions, to compare an infant's smile to—

“ A light of laughing flowers.”

By this art of equivalents he is again a pioneer, the master of all “symbolist movements.”

Moreover, this art is carried out by him in a definite direction, that of an exquisiteness, a delicacy, a suavity which are properly the *sign* of Shelley. If we were asked to quote a few lines truly Shelleyan, might they not be the well-known ones—

“ Where some cloud of dew  
Hangs each a pearl on the pale flowers  
Of the green laurel blown anew  
And bends, and then fades silently  
One frail and pale anemone ? ”

These lines truly bear Shelley's signature. They could have been written by no other poet in the world. Here we have the unique, the inimitable accent.

If, instead of a mere fragment of his style, I were asked to quote a whole single poem most characteristic of his genius, I should of course choose a *short* one, but on reflection I find that I must quote two poems.

As to the first, the “Ode to the West Wind,” everybody will agree. By its fierce impetus, its all-embracing range, the Ode is indeed representative, especially as it combines with Shelley's love for Nature his old unfailing love for humanity :

“ Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind !  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth  
The trumpet of a prophecy ! . . . ”

Stopford Brooke's 'Anthology,' and many another essay on our poet, close upon these words, and they could have no better end. But as I want to give a complete image of Shelley, I cannot be content with the Ode alone, and I feel I must bring in "The Sensitive Plant": for the marvel is that the same poet should have written both.

The Sensitive Plant, which has no bright flower, but more love than any, which so strenuously desires what it has not—the beautiful—is really Shelley's soul.

I need not dwell on the lavish beauty profusely spread on the rose and the tulip and the lily of the vale in that first part, where we seem to hear the hushed respiration of the flowers. In this part all is light, love and life ; in the second all is winter, corruption and death—a contrast of the two sides of Nature, which gets resolved in the conclusion. Now in the description of winter and decay I find a robust realism which is the best reply to my critical remarks:

“ And thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank  
And the dock, and henbane, and hemlock dank . . .  
And the mandrakes, and toadstools, and docks, and  
darnels  
Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels.”

We have here a new sensuousness, the beauty of

ugliness, word-painting—painting by names, without images or epithets, the solid qualities of the sound fitting the qualities of the things named. There is more body here than usual with Shelley. It is more like Keats.

Again, I complained of allegories and vague personifications. But there is nothing vague in this splendid figure of Winter—not a personification, but indeed a living myth :

“ For Winter came : the wind was his whip :  
One choppy finger was on his lip :  
He had torn the cataracts from the hills  
And they clanked at his girdle like manacles.”

What strength of sound and firmness of outline ! As much as in Keats’ “ Hyperion,” almost as much as in Dante.

This poem, unequal to the Ode as it is, seems to acquire an unexpected value on the occasion of a centenary, which, following that of Keats by one year, renders a comparison of the two poets natural and unavoidable. We thought that Keats was the greater artist, but that Shelley had wings which carried him higher.

Now, passages like those quoted might turn the balance in favour of Shelley. He often soars higher than Keats ; he sometimes emulates him on his own ground, and we have not even had time to explore other grounds, like that powerful study in Elizabethan drama, “ The Cenci.” On this variety of gifts, added to the unique gift of the Skylark, my own conviction is formed that Shelley is, on the whole, greater even than Keats.

This simple statement—no vain praise, but the fruit of attentive study—is the best homage that I can offer to his memory.

It is the garland which, in all humility, I lay on his tomb, or bring to him on the completion of his first century of immortality.



## WILLIAM COBBETT.

BY G. K. CHESTERTON, F.R.S.L.

[Read April 26th, 1922.]

THE Chairman has very truly said that in taking "William Cobbett" as the title of these few and rather rambling remarks, I have chosen a neglected name; I should say myself a scandalously neglected name. I believe, however, that it is much less neglected now than it was in the immediate past, and is much more neglected now than it will be in the immediate future. Doubtless serious students of English letters, such as constitute this society, have never wholly lost touch with his tradition. Some things have always been realised in connection with him; and two things at any rate must be known to all. The two facts universally connected with Cobbett, I imagine, are, first, that he was a master of English, and, second, that he was especially a master of that particular sort of plain English which has been localised by the name of Billingsgate. Now to begin with, I am very much concerned to draw the attention of a body devoted to the preservation of our language and literature to the fact that the two things are not unconnected. Billingsgate can be very beautiful English; vigorous invective has about it something specially suited to the turn and tang of the English tongue. It is a language that excels in strong and strident consonants, in abrupt and

angular terminations, in all that sort of grotesque energy that permits us, if I may use the contradictory phrase, a sublimity of bathos. French and other foreign idioms have their own elements of stunning force and almost overpowering power ; but they are inferior in this particular abrupt finality, which I know not how to illustrate better than by saying “ What ho ! she bumps ! ” In French she never bumps. How fortunate is the condition of the Englishman who can kick people : and how relatively melancholy that of the Frenchman who can only give them a blow of the foot ! If we say that two people fight like cat and dog, the very words seem to have in them a shindy of snaps and screams and scratches. If we say “ *comme le chat et le chien*,” we are depressed with the suggestion of comparative peace. Now nobody denies that Cobbett and his enemies did fight like cat and dog, but it is precisely his fighting passages that contain some of the finest examples of a style as English as the word “ dog ” or the word “ cat.” So far as this goes, the point has nothing to do with political or moral sympathies with Cobbett’s cause. The beauty of his incessant abuse is a matter of art for art’s sake. The pleasure which an educated taste received when Cobbett calls a duchess an old cat or a bishop a dirty dog is almost onomatopoeic, in its love of a melody all but detached from meaning. As I shall suggest in a moment, there are many much more serious reasons for a revival of interest in Cobbett than this merely artistic reason<sup>r</sup>; but I put it first, partly because it concerns his supremacy in style, which is admitted even by those who least understand him, and partly because it

concerns a real question of the value of the English language, which ought to be submitted to the more authoritative guardians of English literature.

For there is a serious danger that this charm in English literature may be lost. The comparative absence of abuse in social and senatorial life may take away one of the beauties of our beautiful and historic speech. Words like "scamp" and "scoundrel," which have the unique strength of English in them, are likely to grow unfamiliar through lack of use, though certainly not through lack of opportunity for use. It is indeed strange that when public life presents so wide and promising a field for the use of these terms, they should be suffered to drop into desuetude. It seems singular that when the careers of our public men, the character of our social and commercial triumphs and the general culture and ethic of the modern world seem so specially to invite and, as it were, to cry aloud for the use of such language, the secret of such language should be in danger of being lost. But indeed the two facts are so far from being inconsistent that one is really the explanation of the other. There was less corruption in Cobbett's day precisely because there was more real denunciation like that of Cobbett: precisely because such men did call a spade a spade, and a scamp a scamp. Utterances of this kind have indeed been dismissed in more recent times as "personalities." I have never been able to understand how it is possible to be otherwise than personal in talking about persons. But we shall miss the whole meaning of a great man and a great revolution or transition, if we imagine for a moment that Cobbett's personalities consisted

in pointing out a pimple on somebody's nose or a patch on somebody's trousers. What Cobbett pointed out was not a pimple on the nose that could not be hidden, but a bribe in the pocket that was hidden ; it was not the outer patching of poverty, but the inner padding of wealth. In short, it was something really personal, really private, in the sense that the man had every intention of keeping it private. In that sense certainly a man's pocket is his private affair ; and a man's nose is a public monument by comparison. But though the bribe is something that is always private, it is something that always ought to be public ; and scarcely a man since Cobbett's time has dared to publish a word about it.

Here again, however, we shall be underrating the man and the crisis if we suppose that he was personal, and nothing else. The truth is that few men have been more impersonal than Cobbett, in the sense of that impersonal imagination that can see beyond a country and an age to those huge human things that create what we call history. He was called both a Tory and a Radical, and he was both ; but his mind was immeasurably wider than that of the Tories, who could only cling to the immediate past, or the Radicals, who could only trust to the immediate future. What he saw, as from the height of a hundred years hence or a thousand miles away, was the bird's-eye view of the whole course of modern England. He saw the peasants swallowed by the squires, the squires swallowed by the mercantile magnates, the countryside swallowed by the manufacturing towns ; agriculture dominated by industry, and industry in turn dominated by mere paper finance. He saw all these

things in the season of their youth and hope, when all reformers and pioneers believed in them, when only a few irrational reactionaries resisted them : when all this liberality and economic science really seemed like the promise of a world set right. And Cobbett cursed it all with one comprehensive curse, progressive and conservative, merchant and squire, present and future : he nailed his name to that curse, he tied his whole reputation to that renouncement and abjuration of all the world we know : was defeated, and went down in the dark.

In this aspect it is instructive to compare Cobbett with Carlyle. I cannot disguise the impression that the comparison is one between the genuine article and the false. I am very far from saying that Carlyle was merely a humbug. But I will venture to say that as a pessimist he was entirely a humbug. As a prophet denouncing woe he was really something like a court chaplain compared to Cobbett. So far from being in the social sense a pessimist, he was really a rather unscrupulous optimist : for he was optimistic about the benefits of being unscrupulous. He was optimistic about all those very tendencies of the time about which Cobbett had the courage to be a pessimist. He flattered those very forces of the future which Cobbett had the independence to defy. He flattered the pride of industrialism, the power of machinery, the individualism of the inventors. He flattered our notions of racial pride and imperial expansion, where Cobbett had a far clearer insight into the case for France or America or Ireland. He spoke respectfully about captains of industry, where Cobbett could speak fearlessly even to captains of

armed battalions. Above all, while Cobbett went to prison to prevent the Prussianism of Germany from committing its cruelties in the British army, Carlyle in the same connection effected the most sublime and amazing feat of optimism that imagination can conceive. He was optimistic about the rise of Prussia. Set beside that, all other outbursts of complacency, Pope saying that whatever is is right, Browning saying that all is right with the world, Whitman saying that all that is is acceptable, fade by comparison into a gentle melancholy. The man who could be cheerful about Frederick the Great could be cheerful about anything.

But what was admired in Carlyle was what was admirable in Cobbett. What Carlyle, with all his merits, merely posed as being, Cobbett with all his faults really was. He was a Jeremiah, and a justified Jeremiah. He was a man who defied the world, and the way the world was going. He did not whitewash the squires to blacken the merchants, like Young England, or whitewash the merchants to blacken the squires, like the Manchester School. He laid about him on every side until he stood alone. He had the faults that go with such an isolation; but surely a man must be a little unimaginative, and even a little ungenerous, not to feel that it is in some ways a splendid isolation. Anyhow it is the isolation for which Carlyle was considered splendid. Indeed the different fate of the two protests is sufficiently significant as to the difference between the realistic and the merely romantic prophet of woe. Carlyle has been presented as a spectre of pessimism, a skeleton at the feast, a shadow in the sunlight, a presence

solemnly reminding us of death and doom. Cobbett has not been presented at all. He has been hidden. He is not the skeleton at the feast, but the skeleton in the cupboard.

And when we speak of him as a prophet, if only a prophet of woe, there is another fitness in the figure, though it be something more vague or more difficult to express. Cobbett would seem the very contrary of a mystic; yet it is hard not to write mystically about him. It was indeed the mark of many figures in the great revolutionary epoch, of Danton, of Napoleon, or of Washington, that they seem suited to be the heroes of whom epics are written rather than the poets who write them. Like the other three, Cobbett was of the eighteenth century in his refreshing rationality and lucidity; but in retrospect, as it recedes from us, that broad daylight takes on the colours of a bright but ominous sunset. The great lover of plain speech was the very reverse of a symbolist; but for all that he is a symbol. If William Blake could make such a medley of prophets and prigs as to conceive a symbolic design called "Pitt guiding Leviathan," he would have had a hundred times better reason to design one called "Cobbett Riding the Red Horse of the Apocalypse." And indeed the reference to Blake is not irrelevant. Not only is the halo of hatred round the figure of the old fighter something to which that dark dynamic genius might have done some justice; it is, moreover, true that the mixed feelings with which a modern critic must regard him are very like the medley of rustic realities and transcendental revelations in Blake's notes and verses at Felpham. As these seem to

present a curious patchwork of green fields of Sussex and golden streets of Jerusalem, as we seem to see a foreground of divine tabernacles with a background of the Downs, so for any man looking back on the work of Cobbett there will mingle a pleasure in the naturalness of his love of England with a curious subconscious thrill at the vast forces he was defying and the huge destiny he was striving to divert. But we have lived to see those forces which he failed to baffle themselves beginning to fail, and that huge destiny betraying, by something more than dark hints, that it may be a huge mistake. The world went over Cobbett like a wave ; but it looks as if the wave had touched the high-water mark and was already an ebbing tide. The problems of unemployment, of food in wartime, of the international tangle of trade, have raised new doubts that are very near to those old denunciations. Nobody now is certain that it was wise to make England the workshop of the world, especially when half the workshop is not working. Nobody now can repose in the retrospect of a merely mercantile trade increasing, especially if it is declining. Indeed, Cobbett's case, which in his own time was only answered by optimism, is now only answered by pessimism. The best that can now be said, for the industrialism then called inevitable, is to call it incurable. In other words, the critics of Cobbett, having silenced the great voice for a hundred years, have woken up to it just in time to say that it is too late. In any case it is with the return of unanswerable realities that his name has returned to us ; there is nothing antiquarian or aesthetic about his resurrection. It was easy enough



to represent his comment on his own time as wild and fanatical ; it is as a comment on our time that it is realistic and relevant. The prophet was certainly stoned, and nobody has yet seriously attempted to build his sepulchre ; there is no monument save the size of the heap of stones—the sort of boulders under which men bury a giant. But even if we did set up in the market-place a worthy statue of Cobbett, the pedestal could only be inscribed with the irritating maxim : “ I told you so.” The present increase of his prestige owes nothing to favour or pleasure or the modern sort of popularity. It is a victory very rare even in the annals of prophets. His prophecies were forgotten until they were fulfilled.



# THE NATURALISTIC MOTIVE IN MODERN PICTURES.

BY EDWIN FAGG, F.R.S.L.

[Read November 22nd, 1922.]

IF we consider nineteenth century painting, we see that it was to a great extent in unison with the contemporary romantic and poetic impulse, the words "nature" and "landscape" becoming synonymous; and in spite of landscape painting taking at times apparently a secondary place in public esteem, yet its breadth and lighting gradually modelled the condition of all pictures, obliterating the distinction between the so-called figure and landscape painters. Also, far from progressively affirming Sir Joshua Reynolds' comprehensive definition of nature, that is, including "the internal fabric of the mind and imagination," the ideal of the natural appeared to shrink to a purely optical value. There was a continuous inquisition into the qualities of appearance over a range of momentary values alien to the placed spirit of a Claude or the seventeenth-century Dutch Masters; who were, however, never wholly out of view. Otherwise painting certainly illustrated romantic enthusiasm; literally "the lovely vagaries and primitive chaos" of the Schlegel manifesto, to the last phases of which contemporary Post-Impressionism opposes something forcible and severe in form.

As in poetry, the intimate bond between nature and the soul of man was recognised : but the novelty lay in the isolation of the interest. The actual increase in apparent familiarity is not without qualification. In mediæval poetry and painting the natural is delightfully humanised, and birds, beasts, saints, angels and devils play in concert. Birds perch near an enthroned Madonna, or from a twig contemplate a saintly martyrdom : and some perky little spaniel trying to attract the attention of St. Jerome is not less intimately natural than the dogs of Landseer. And if we consider, for instance, Italian landscape as a whole we are amazed at its complexity, its simple grasp of the very spirit of landscape, its trees and flowers, its rich variety and limitless patterns. But mainly it was a background. With the nineteenth century it became without disguise a main interest. But this in its turn was treated relatively as a background, since Impressionistic forms approximated to distant silhouette. To this, contemporary Post-Impressionism among other things opposes a sense of volume and foreground considerations. Theoretically, I think that is the situation.

There is, of course, also the complete rejection of natural form at certain extremes, very much on the same plea as with blank verse at times : that is, its abuse as a form. But just as in letters, the "intellectual romantics in rebellion against life imagining a hero in whom their defiance is manifested," use such forms comparatively and not exclusively, so one would imagine that a similar principle must hold good in painting.

But the assumed identity of fact and its expression

in paint undoubtedly is a nuisance obscuring more real issues ; and although as a matter of theory it may be conceded that for the artist objects exist only as experiences or as the occasion of them, and in spite of the obvious limitations of pigment, a popular confusion of expressive with purely imitative values survives with reference to painting ; and by way of strengthening this misconception, now and then the painter may receive some particularly handsome testimonial to an unsuspected accuracy certified by unimpeachable authority.

For instance, recently Dr. Sprigge told us of the greater accuracy of the painter as compared to the novelist in matters of disease, of his notable preference for leprosy and rickets, marred only by his unaccountable oversight with regard to the possibilities of cleft palate ; and it is on record that Professor Charcot, the great neurologist, saw the picture in Genoa, by Rubens, of St. Ignatius casting a devil out of a young girl, and was "so impressed by the accuracy of the delineation of acute hysteria that he was led to study the subject from the medico-artistic point of view."

In the face of the enthusiasm aroused by these considerations, critical authority may seem a little tame in its opinion that a good picture is merely one that takes its place unobtrusively on a wall ; but although it may not sound sufficiently exciting, probably the necessity provides the painter with as much excitement as he feels he needs. A glance at the walls of any gallery confirms the decorative purpose of the painter, even taking precedence of the naturalistic.

If, however, we divide the function of painting

into decoration and illustration, we find the division convenient rather than essential ; the brush, surface and pigment conspiring automatically towards the decorative ; like the simple full blacks in a Bewick wood block, sometimes the mechanical necessity and artistic desire are in unison. Even if we take the obviously naturalistic and decorative forms of painting, as in Courbet's and in Whistler's seascapes, for instance, we see really only decoration on different bases : the natural is still dominated by the pattern of the whole in spite of the difference in content. In Courbet this is the weight and stress of the wave ; in Whistler the delicate charm of colour ; but each demands instinctively certain forms and certain exclusions in the interests of a coherent, that is, a decorative form.

If we take the originating impulse in painting as a conviction concerned with objects, feelings, ideas, or observation indifferently, and not with any one of these things necessarily, and note that the conviction has varied in expression from being mainly an extension of political and religious considerations to the emotional and intellectual expression of the individual, both the progressive and imitative factors become more reasonably proportionate to the main value. For instance, it is more essential to regard Turner as the embodiment of different considerations, than merely as a progression from Claude. Notwithstanding the obvious and necessary connection in the craft of picture making, Turner's conception of objective sublimity is far removed from Claude's desire to give a sense of landscape without its particularities. The separate values remain distinct,

and we would not have them compromise each other, the values not being scientific but poetic ; representing a different balance between the mind and the senses, not something merely true.

The progressive, imitative and utilitarian hypotheses obscured the value of Constable and Cotman ; and even now it is doubtful whether the unique personality of Cotman is appreciated ; for when antiquarian and tourist preoccupations were in the ascendant his exquisite sensibility preserved a serene chastity of spirit, and a robust sense of delicate values delivered in decisive unassailable forms. Like nature itself, some of his water-colours are a parable of apparently effortless expression. But his generation, possibly comprehending natural history, did not comprehend his unobtrusive water-colour ; nor Constable's grasp of ample spaces over which pass great shafts of light, or appreciate his sense of a world not neatly definable. While Ruskin credited him with the vision of an intelligent stag, Constable really showed himself akin to the poets, his contemporaries, who practically one and all gave a spiritual interpretation to the natural : for Constable, in spite of his romantic affection for tree and cottage, " rotting posts and the noise of water escaping from mill-dams," made indeed these things his foothold, but expressed them as subordinate to and in the atmosphere of a vaster world.

As with Claude, there is an absence of irrelevant intimacy which is the condition of the expression. The romantic movement was naturalistic with an unprecedented intimacy ; but " the office of the graphic arts remains the same—to arrange a sensuous present-

ment, so that whatever elements may be valued are expressed appropriately by a chosen form." In this respect the classical can be not only as natural a form as romanticism, but also may appear so by comparison, as with David's heroes of antiquity; who with their naked muscular arms and legs, and manly faces with their own hair and beards, seemed to the youthful Talma more natural than those with wigs and plumes, powder, patches and silk stockings; although the player of *pères noble* grumbled at the lack of facility in Roman costumes for producing the traditional pocket-handkerchief.

Some two hundred years ago, in his 'Theory of Painting,' Richardson justified pictures as "universally delightful and making one part of our ornamental furniture." Contemporary appreciation would agree, but possibly substituting the word "decorative" for ornamental. Also it is doubtful whether the concentrated force aimed at in so much contemporary design obviously falls within the formula of unobtrusiveness laid down by contemporary authority; and it is of the structure communicating this force that usually the painter is thinking when he uses the word "decorative," rather than a tame utility or a twentieth century version of eighteenth century "embellishment."

Otherwise the word "decorative" may connote not only the device of composition but its effect; but in any case the satisfaction is in some form other than the naturalistic. Decorative structure in the ordinary sense of flat pattern is familiar; but its logical progression in the matter of depth is not so easily recognised, although painters from Giotto to the



present time have struggled with various degrees of success to reconcile the naturalistic with these two conditions of structure, to which mechanical perspective is subservient. In Poynter's 'Visit to Æsculapius,' for instance, mechanical perspective dominates; consequently there is no picture; but rather a diagrammatic elaboration of little value. On the other hand, in Hogarth's second scene in the "Marriage à la Mode" series, all the conditions of light, pattern and colour are practically a coherent structure; and instead of a shallow tableau on a flat ground, he takes unusually full charge of the third dimension in his pattern. This is all the more extraordinary, considering the detailed topical interest which was the condition of its production. Also in the engraving of the arrest of the Idle Apprentice and other prints, there is a violent perspective with a seemingly El Greco like desire to comprehend the tableau in one structure complete in itself; the violent focus keeps the eye from wandering off to infinities which are irrelevant. Obviously, all pictures must have a focus and perspective relative to their own necessities, and not to one uniform experience, and upon this variable basis, the imaginative structure called composition is built; that is, the picture itself.

As the value of painting consists so much in its imaginative device, a certain group urges "a fiercer disdain of realism . . . that the semblance of the human form should disappear as a design proceeds, and in its place that some form relying upon itself for significance be produced." As most forms of composition, pictorial or poetical, have something of this value which is suggested by the complete form rather

than by its detailed content, theoretically there may be strength in the position ; but in practice the expressions of the group in question suggest much more standardised production than any intriguing or intelligible significance. For instance, consider the picture labelled " Battery Shelled " among the War Pictures exhibited a few years ago at the Academy. With its rocking lines, bending towers and general upheaval one could well believe that the nightmare had achieved its significant form ; but when later, far from shell-burst and high-explosive came the portrait of Ezra Pound, looking similarly significant although the subject was apparently quietly at home, one could not help suspecting a recipe ; and with kindred work, we have not the sense of life, but of something dead and potted or smartly tinned.

But on the other hand, we must note that the war pictures as a whole were not conceived as regimental emblems by somebody only distantly concerned, but by many as relating to a personal and unique experience ; and whatever may be the exactly appropriate form of expression, it seems unlikely that the pastoral and atmospheric could be that form. A series of abrupt and sinister objects, commonplaces suddenly acquiring absurdly disproportionate values which distance cannot soften, or natural beauty in astonishing contradiction to tragedy, as the flower in Lamb's Judæan picture, or the silhouettes of grotesque mules bulking more largely in the eye than in the thought, as in Spencer's ambulance picture, possibly these expressions are absolutely in tune with the experience and intention : although they are not pretty after the manner of Alma Tadema.

But apart from these genuine and really merely incidental essays, the mass of work where the spiritual horizon was confined by a formula tamely redelivered every day possibly has engendered violent reactions. Having shed history and fable the aspiration of painting towards a condition as independent as that of music is reasonable, if not altogether new. The utility of considering elemental form and colour is obvious at least in many an Underground poster, where sharp forms and gay colour have discarded photographic naturalisms with advantage—the advantage of expression over description.

Before a Hals or a Rembrandt the trivialities of the snuff-box painter disappear: and drastic simplicity should be a good imaginative stimulus, as it places the fullest responsibility upon the essential qualities of paint; just as in the theatre the apron stage and absence of scenery places a greater value on the voice and personality of the actor.

Under present circumstances appreciation and emulation of historical models gravitates naturally towards archaic forms: but the fact that possibly the primitives were trying very hard to get away from the condition which secures them so much admiration is usually overlooked. The early Florentines were near enough to the mosaicists to reflect their largeness of design, and were forced to obtain the greatest significance by the simplest means, and the value of a world unregarded by the mosaicist. And in our admiration for Byzantine mosaic we note that its satisfactory simplicity is due to a structural compulsion, an agreed idea and a belief in its permanence. Therefore in the face of these clear

limitations obviously the Saints and Emperors could be reduced to their decorative emblems, to colour, spaces and architectonic proportions, and solemnly and solidly fixed. But we have no such belief or agreement; so the compulsion must be sheer imagination proceeding to unknown ends.

If we consider painting as the expression of "the shows of things submitted to the desire of the mind," its historical essays regain their separate and permanent value, rather like historical personages; and the rejection of natural form as an element in painting becomes meaningless, since all pictorial naturalisms have had only a qualified existence in accordance with some governing idea. What is seen and not what is reflected in the natural mirror is the real starting point; and we are apt to forget, although the painter does not, that painting begins in a conviction and on a canvas.

Although apparently obvious, the importance of these considerations cannot be overrated; for "as very few care for art, and those that do usually have mistaken it for something else," our general principles may be too irrelevant, and as ineffective for genuine appreciation as Addison's eighteenth century common sense and culture was for the solution of abstract problems. We may be quite determined not to confuse the verdicts of "the one sphere of judgment given as truth, morality or beauty," but our conceptions of truth and beauty may be merely a matter of the customary; even they may confuse aesthetic with direct social propaganda.

If we consider the painting apparently most concerned with illusory appearance, that is, that of the

Impressionists, we find that either the decorative and the natural are inseparable, or that where a choice is made it is the decorative that survives. For instance, Monet did not "change the disposition of any line of tree or river or hill," but a certain distribution of colour spots was indispensable to make the natural scattering of objects negligible, and, of course, this distribution was settled on the canvas in accord with the containing form, as always. Also, with Manet, in any choice between fact and free handling—the free movement of the brush stroke—it was the brush stroke that survived; a principle endorsed by Ruskin in theory, *i. e.*, "In any branch of art only so much imitation is to be admitted as is consistent with the ease of the workman and the capacities of his material."

As a curiosity we may note that between Ruskin and Whistler also there is a similar apparent agreement in principle. One amusing incident in their disagreement is that Whistler's "Ten o'clock" almost paraphrases Ruskin on Turner's "Venice"; that is, with Whistler the London chimneys became campanile, and the warehouses, palaces. Ruskin's Venetian campanile had become tongues of fire, and the palaces unable to look still more palatial became pale ranks of flame. Each laboured to show how much a natural fact was transfigured in becoming pictorial.

The objections to the fullest realism in pictures are not in the first place emotional, but technical; the objection to passages impossible to relate that make a coherence and unity of design impossible; and particularly a distaste for the beastly mess that occurs

when pigment is forced beyond the point where it retains any vital colour quality. Titian and the Bellinis placed colour before small illusions—hence the beauty of their work—while the Italian demand was for such illusion, insatiably.

The realistic qualities of most pictures are really analogies of light and dark, warm and cold. Their total form is an analogy to a comprehension and not to a descriptive observation. The impressionistic analogy was the colours of the solar spectrum; the ancient browns and reds and blacks being discarded; the juxtaposition of colour spots of itself suggested the glamour of sunlight. The instinct for decoration being at least as strong as the instinct for the natural, the short step to the adoption of pure prismatic colour schemes was soon taken, for the painter recognised a renewed meaning in the word “decoration” in the enjoyment of these elemental values.

The ancient painters, thanks to the Virgin and the Saints and their colour emblems, tried to make their new sense of the real world carry the gay colour of Byzantine imagery. Recently painters made rich pigment the vital undercurrent of their presentation of the apparently normal appearance of a grey world of everyday, as with our painters of the 'nineties. Many contemporary painters are inclined to reject this grey world; substituting for tone and illusion, colour, invention, decoration and incisive drawing.

An unfamiliar example of this view is provided in the landscapes of the late Dick Innes, in such drawings as “Canigou” and “Plynlimmon”; and more familiarly in the work of the Post-Impressionists, of Henry Lamb, Augustus John, Eric Kennington and others.

From the Impressionistic point of view, the Turner water colours are the unassailable traditional examples of the validity of contemporary theory; as they frequently offer to disinterested contemplation that rarity—a coherent expression of a complete aesthetic experience from which all impertinent values have disappeared. Turner was contemplating picture making on a pure colour basis in his latter days. The example is all the better since the drawings are no more consciously abstractions than they are natural history studies; as by long instinctive preference his pre-occupation was as naturally with colour and atmosphere, that is, with appearance apart from fact, as the concern of the ordinary person is with fact apart from appearance. Also there is no question of mere taste or loyalty to a movement; but the mature simplification of fifty years of radiant growth and experience.

In view of the small amount of work left by the youthful Innes, and much of it experimental, it may seem extravagant to give his work a very high value; but incontestably, even in these fragments he shows a depth and conviction which belongs only to a master; his essential intimacy and power is such, that even the comparison with a mature master such as John does not leave him at a disadvantage. Nor does any other contemporary landscape work show quite the convinced force and fervour of the work of Innes.

Once in a fit of despondency Sir Thomas Lawrence wrote: “ ’Tis hard to toil and struggle for some subtle requirement of a line or a Harmony of Lines that shall unite as a whole, where the parts have been of arduous execution, (only) in order to meet the

prompt decision of one rapid glance of ignorance." Popular judgment, innocent of the meaning of purpose, design or material, is naturally more concerned with the preservation of the familiar than with the technical appreciation of artistic purpose : consequently a strange point of view is as disturbing as a clean Claude or a whitewashed Westminster Abbey ; where a robust technical conscience refuses to confuse grime with mellow weathering, and places little value on decay or dirty varnish. In the same spirit the late Havard Thomas discarded the green paint in universal use to give a spurious appearance of age and weathering to sculptured bronze, and with great labour produced a genuinely beautiful surface by an ancient method.

In the desire for "the absence of all possible humbug by a nervous, sadly experienced and suspicious generation," this should count for righteousness : but the persistence of a few unimaginative enthusiasts places upon distortion a value it does not possess, to the detriment of a reasonable appreciation of El Greco and Cezanne. Consequently when the new El Greco appeared at the National Gallery, its innocent historical value was obscured ; and many Justice Shallows strutted scowling in front of it, threatening to make a Star Chamber matter of it, and would not be persuaded.

The shadow of El Greco is over a certain amount of current painting ; but although his contemporary Sir Francis Bacon certainly said truly that "there is no Excellent Beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion," possibly he was not thinking of any such literal distortion ; yet the sober Velasquez



found much to praise in El Greco and much to learn from him.

Among other things we see that part of his strangeness is due to the usual overlapping of the ideals of more than one generation ; here an anticipation, there a reminiscence. The reconciliation of these constituted part of his strange personality. Beautiful passages of light, air, colour and form find a footing in his canvasses, which would be more in harmony with the seventeenth century.

There is the elongation that recalls Parmigiano : the violent movement that contradicts his own generation of the Caracci ; but most important of all, a structural gesture is substituted for a merely vacuous elegance.

Blake produced fluent imaginative forms that had neither forerunners nor fellows ; but circumstances, tradition and propinquity all seemed to conspire to give El Greco the strange form his genius demanded.

Consider his art : Byzantine in origin, Venetian by education, and himself suddenly thrust into Toledo—an incorrigibly mediaeval Spanish city even in 1580 : the air charged with the miraculous ; with shrines decorated by primitive painters towards which the Counter Reformation looked as to sanctities that had escaped the defilement of the Renaissance. (Guido, for instance, prayed to a Madonna blackened by age.) By a very short transition the emotion of Morales would approximate to the ecstasy of El Greco, and in a strange land what more natural than to emphasise the qualities obviously appealing ? In the “ Burial of Count Orgaz,” we see all these elements—the rigid Byzantine, the expressive movement, the strange

lighting and the powerful portraiture, combine into one triumphant flaming structure.

This creative power of singularly appropriate imaginative structure welding all its elements to one end, instead of merely distributing them, gives his historical achievement peculiar interest to those Post-Impressionist painters who maintain the continuous necessity of strenuous invention in the face of each differing circumstance, rather than a vague routine reducing all experiences to a common value.

But El Greco's actual forms are as non-transferable as Blake's; and the theorists are not excused from the rational test of any device, *i. e.*, the degree of comprehension afforded by it.

The imaginative worlds of Blake and El Greco convince us as Spenser's fairy world convinces; although its fauna are unknown to our everyday existence. But the world of Roberts and Lewis remains one of diagram and marionette; at the best merely cancelling a dull routine of polishing obsolete formulas.

Although in most artistic appreciation our concern may be with results and not with processes, in painting an appreciation of almost every phase is essential. It is necessary to realise that values do not accumulate automatically with complexity, that apparently rudimentary essays may be no less complete. Draughtsmanship is the first condition in practice and the true primitive simplicity; imaginative in essence since it concentrates a world of values into a line.

The painter does not solemnly and self-consciously say, "I will now make a noble drawing." What a host of values would never have materialised had

Rembrandt first considered whether a bristly hog hobbled for slaughter was a proper subject for an artist? In the very act of drawing it became that very different thing: the expression both of his comprehension of the experience and of an etching needle. The fables of the miraculous line from Apelles to Albert Durer are obviously essentially true. Possibly that is what Matisse and every shy Parisian revolutionary knows, since they are so reluctant to proceed beyond the sketch where vitality is most concentrated.

But every extension in design as mass, composition or structure, is a similarly expressive and possibly as unconscious a limitation as the line.

Of necessity the key of the design itself varies with every change in general values; but even when the main objective is the same, the variations in practice may be even greater than between Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, and an arbitrary invention is common to all. For instance, to take historic examples, one of the first results of nineteenth century naturalism was to split the British painters into two factions, respectively nicknamed by their critics "Bianchi" and "Neri."

The Neri did not attempt the impossible task of rivalling the brilliancy of natural lighting; its analogy was to enforce shadows and the general tone of pictures with gradations of light on a lower scale. The followers of Reynolds would be of this faction; and in their portraits the local colour of flesh and fabrics would appear as the possible reality in their pictorial decoration.

The Bianchi proceeded instinctively on Impres-

sionist principles, endeavouring to rival the brilliancy of sunlight ; and as that was impossible, they increased the variety of brilliant and delicate colouring in the light parts of their picture, in place of the older convention of a simple blue light as with Wilson. They made colour a substitute for shadow, cutting out the lower scale of shadow completely. Turner, the soul of this enterprise, renounced the coarser contrasts as a means of suggesting receding planes ; that is, in the expression of graduated horizontal projection with which he replaced the traditional vertical consideration in landscape, he substituted delicacy of draughtsmanship for violent modelling.

So the choice before the painter is the distribution he chooses to make within the very short range of his pigment. The greater Turner's sense of infinity, the more exacting the transitions and the greater the attenuation of the force of pigment for the desired end. But much contemporary landscape reverses this process. If we compare Cezanne and Turner, we find that where Turner distributed his pigment in subtle gradations for the sake of light and depth, in Cezanne this power is violently contracted ; and the full force of colour is discharged over a restricted area for the sake of the fullest power ; the pictorial transitions being complementary transitions to preserve this primitive force.

Impressionism dealt with the natural as a world of distant silhouettes in terms of grey. Post-Impressionism attempts to deal with a foreground world with a sense of volume. Where in Corot there is a sense of mild recessions in a world of vague loveliness, in Cezanne there is a fierce thrusting of a structure of

planes forcibly linked ; and in opposition to Corot's twilight softness his surfaces are metallic, stiff and glowing with colour. Still life, a vertical hill crowded with square houses, a limited horizon and an oriental brilliancy of colour, these are the characteristics which we find echoing Cezanne at the present moment.

Like Constable, Cezanne, although apparently clumsy, was concerned with something vital ; but there is also a curiously negative quality in a certain amount of contemporary work usually accompanied by the denunciation of any normal draughtsman as "photographic." The dread of the photographic and enthusiasm for the oriental seem to some extent linked. Certain apparent similarities to Impressionistic vision, its qualities of intelligent design impossible to confuse with the photographic, or with Greco-Roman form, or the detested natural resemblance that plagued Cezanne, made Asiatic work seem ideal ; and in the unsteadiness of personal authority replacing fixed traditional values, the sense of something serene, masterly confident and age-old made an irresistible appeal.

An accumulation of circumstances has driven the painter steadily in the direction where considerations of pure colour and incisive form rule. Hence a renewed interest in primitive work.

But a reference to some of these simplicities, Byzantine mosaic for instance, might lead the sensitive and enthusiastic rather to abandon the medium of paint as a pretentious substitute ; for enthusiasm is stimulated strongly by the structural quality of mosaic and its harmony with other varieties of its own form, no less decorative and even more con-

structive; the smaller pebble in the wall, the larger tile in the pavement, and bricks and stone seeming one species varied according to office and intention. Also in the pure even colour spots, the designer recognises a tangible essay in divisionism, and the element of his craft.

We accept some wonderfully decorative peacock all the more heartily because there is no possible comparison with a real bird; and if we are confronted suddenly with a fair comparison—for instance, the painted and the mosaic domes of Ravenna—the painted work seems a shabby imposture. I imagine some such instinctive choice helped to sway William Morris towards tangible decoration in metal, glass and fabric and away from picture making. The alternative is the development of the native quality of pigment as with Manet and the Post-Impressionists.

In certain contemporary work in D. Y. Cameron's and Sir Charles Holmes' landscapes, we see a mature expression of intellectual force which is opposed to emotional impressionistic helplessness. Chosen values addressed to developed sensibility with an exquisite severity of design is the desired ideal.

One phase of nineteenth century decoration passed to the theatre, and has since developed with the new power for good and evil in the tremendous force and distribution of light and colour there available. Turner and Gainsborough's work was modified by contemplating De Louthembourg's theatrical experiments, and contemporary picture making may be qualified similarly. The connection, of course, is as ancient as the designs of Inigo Jones. And as "there is only one art, the art of design," obviously it need

not necessarily deliver its conceptions in paint on canvas ; and just as many became Morris's craftsmen rather than picture makers, so many from Mr. Craig to Mr. Rutherston have found a widened scope for pictorial conception in the theatre.

In contemporary work we see unfamiliar values becoming articulate. Recently some young poets were trounced, it may be justly, for wasting " powers worthy of great themes on moonlight on birds' eggs." But similarly with painters, although subject matter at times may appear as trivial or as unpromising as Rembrandt's hog, still the expression of " the profound quality of human life may be revealed in the common spectacle," however, contracted its focus.

I have tried to indicate some of the preliminary considerations possible before a speculation upon the painters' larger motives ; but there " the truly imaginative has its leaves in the light, but its roots are in darkness " ; at most we observe the continuity of the known with the unknown.

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